

"PREACHING THE CHRISTIAN DEUTERONOMY

LUKE 9:51 - 18:14"

by

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Professional Project

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology at Claremont

May 1983

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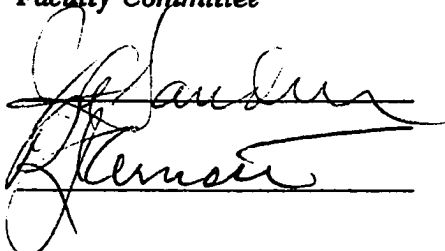
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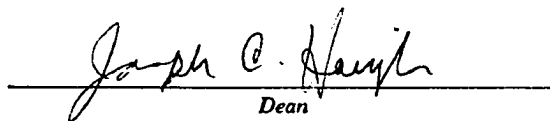
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Faculty Committee



April 6, 1983
Date


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere love is expressed to the members of the Community Presbyterian Church of Laguna Beach, California who have listened to my sermons with patience and affirmation. They provided the context for God's Word to be spoken and heard. Without the understanding and support of my wife, Kay, and my son, Jeff, this project would not have been completed. Gratitude is also due my two secretaries Lenor Jones and Janice Cafarella who typed the first draft from my written script. The D. Min. program was made possible through a gift by the Phillips Estate that was designated by the Session of the Laguna Church for this doctoral program. James A. Sanders and Robert Arnott have graciously guided me in my work. I say "thank you" to all of the above.

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ABSTRACT

During the Fall of 1980, I preached ten sermons at The Community Presbyterian Church of Laguna Beach, California, where I am the pastor. My purpose was to preach from Luke's Central Section 9:51-18:14, which is sometimes called a Christian Deuteronomy. I surveyed the history of interpretation of this section of Luke's Gospel and then chose to use James A. Sanders' hermeneutical methodology to interpret Luke's and Jesus' use of Deuteronomy to address the Word of God to his time and place. Eight hermeneutical questions were asked and answered for each text:

1. What is God doing in this situation?
2. With whom do we identify in this text?
3. How was Luke re-presenting Deuteronomy and thereby adapting the older tradition to his situation?
4. Was Luke using the hermeneutic of prophetic critique or a constitutive hermeneutic?
5. How do we read the text honestly?
6. What does it mean to read the text with humility?
7. Where is the humor in the text?
8. What does the text contribute to our church's self-understanding and mission in the world?

Our church's context is summarized for each sermon and then the sermon is presented. In the final chapter, I evaluated my methodology and my sermons from the perspective of the

preaching theory of Edmund A. Steimle and Fred B. Craddock. What became clear is that preaching is a shared story that embraces the preacher, the listeners, the churchly context, and the message under a consciously chosen hermeneutic indicated by the context and the needs of God's people and the world. What also emerged was a new appreciation of Luke's and Jesus' knowledge of Scripture, especially the book of Deuteronomy. The entire Central Section of Luke's Gospel is a Christian Deuteronomy used by Luke's Jesus to call into question the Pharisaical inversion of Deuteronomy's doctrine of election. Luke's Jesus consistently used the hermeneutic of prophetic critique. Following Luke's Jesus, we find our own christian identity challenged and our destiny questioned.

CHAPTER I

INTERPRETATION OF LUKE'S CENTRAL SECTION:
LUKE 9:51-18:14Resseguie 1975

Biblical scholarship has been puzzled by Luke's purpose in the central section of his gospel. James L. Resseguie in 1975 summarized the various scholarly contributions made on this section of Luke's gospel since 1856.¹ What follows is a brief summary of this important survey. The literature clearly has been at a loss to discover Luke's purpose in chapters 9:51-19:44. I. Howard Marshall wrote, "the existence of this section in Luke is hard to explain, and it is doubtful whether the various recent studies of it have adequately accounted for its nature."² Since so much material is unique to Luke, the interpreter of this section receives little help in comparing the material with the other synoptics to determine Luke's intention. Even though the impression of a journey is given in the section, it cannot be traced on a map. The narrative abounds with vague references to time and place which give the reader little indication of where Jesus is. Titles given to

¹James L. Resseguie, "Interpretation of Luke's Central Section (Luke 9:51-19:44) Since 1856," Studia Biblica Et Theologica, 5:2 (October 1975) 3-36.

²I. Howard Marshall, Luke: Historian and Theologian (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 149-50, cited in *ibid*, 3.

the section have ranged from: "The Great Interpolation," "The Samaritan Section," "The Gospel of the Journeys of Jesus," to "The Central Section."

Resseguie reviews fourteen approaches to the central section that have been advanced since 1856.

Various Sources.

By studying the sources in the central section some scholars have found in them a clue to the author's arrangement of the material. In 1912 Dean Wickes (*The Sources of Luke's Perean Section*) concluded that Luke used two documents in writing this section.³ One document was intended for instruction and encouragement of disciples and for those engaged in missions. The second source he called the Judean document and it dealt with the theme of repentance. This material was written to be used with those who were not yet disciples.

Recently George Ogg proposed that Luke was familiar with two streams of traditions, each of which had its own account of the last journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem.⁴ Luke used one of these accounts (a) in writing 9:51-10:42, and the other (b) in 17:11-19:28. The first account appears to be

³Dean Wickes, The Sources of Luke's Perean Section (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912) 7, cited in *ibid.*, 5.

⁴George Ogg, "The Central Section of the Gospel According to St. Luke," New Testament Studies, 18 (1971-72) 39-53, cited in *ibid.*

chronologically ordered. Luke 11:1-17:10 corresponds to Mark 5:45-8:26 and it was inserted simply because Luke could not add it elsewhere. (b) which commences in 17:11 is another account of the same journey to Jerusalem. Ogg's analysis relies heavily upon references to the travel notices. However, the only fixed point of the section from 9:51 to 18:14 is the goal Jerusalem. T. W. Manson makes the point, "whatever else 9:51-18:14 may be, it does not appear to be a chronicle."⁵ The travel notices were apparently inserted for a reason other than providing a running chronicle of Jesus' journey.

A Travel Narrative: Several Journeys

Exponents of this theory claim that Luke has constructed more than one journey to Jerusalem. These theories appeal to the Gospel of John with its several visits of Jesus to Jerusalem. It is argued that Jesus must have traveled to Jerusalem three times a year as Deuteronomy 16:16 required and Jesus would have traveled to Jerusalem at least that many times. The length of the central section requires it. C. J. Cadoux provides this schema:⁶ I. Luke 10:25-13:9 - John 7. Feast of Tabernacles; II. Luke 17:9-14 - John 10. Feast of Dedication;

⁵T. W. Manson, The Sayings of Jesus (London: SCM Press, 1949) 256, cited in *ibid.*, 7.

⁶C. J. Cadoux, "The Visits of Jesus to Jerusalem," Expositor, ser. 9,3 (1925) 175-192, cited in *ibid.*

III. Passion Visit - John 12. However, the secret journey of John 7 is not compatible with Luke 10:25-13:9. E. J. Cook seeks to overcome the difficulties.⁷ His schema is as follows: I. Luke 9:51-10:42 - John 5; II. Luke 11:1-13:9 - John 7; III. Luke 13:22-33 - John 10; IV. Luke 14:25-19:28. Resseguie suggests that to seek to harmonize John and Luke is to misread Luke and to fail to see that Luke's intention is to keep his reader's attention focused on the goal of the journey-Jerusalem. L. C. Girard outlines three journeys in the central section.⁸ He calls this section, "The Gospel of the Journeys of Jesus." According to Girard, Luke created a fourth synoptic, i.e. 9:51-18:14. The first journey was 9:51-10:42 which was made after the Galilean conflicts and the Sermon on the Mount and ends with the episode of Martha and Mary at Bethany. The second journey, 13:1-34, corresponds to the intervention of Herod in Luke 9:1-9. The final journey to Jerusalem occurs after a period in Philips' territory to which the parables of Luke 14-16 belong. This view has its difficulties. Resseguie argues that chronological and geographical details are few and vague. Luke refers to only one journey. The section contains disconnected, individual episodes.

⁷E. J. Cook, "Synoptic Indications of the Visits of Jesus to Jerusalem," Expository Times, 41 (1929-30)121-23, cited in *ibid.*, 8.

⁸L. C. Girard, L'Evangile des voyages de Jesus, ou la section 9:51-18:14 de Saint Luc (Paris: Gabalda, 1951), cited in *ibid.*, 9.

A Travel Narrative: A Threefold Account of One Journey

G. MacKinlay detects in Luke's tendency to emphasize important points by repeating a story three times a literary clue to the structure of the central section: Luke mentions Paul's conversion thrice; Paul remained blind for three days; and in Peter's vision the sheet was let down three times to the ground.⁹ By referring to an event three times, Luke was indirectly able to stress the importance of an event. Luke emphasizes the same last journey to Jerusalem three times: (1) 4:31 to end of chapter 10; (2) beginning 11:1-14:2; and (3) 14:25-20:18. But the question of why Luke would have done this remains unanswered.

A Literary Model: Old Testament Influence

C. F. Evans, in reviewing Girard's work, suggests that Deuteronomy, "in which a mass of teaching is thrown into the form of a journey under the shadow of the approaching analepsis," provides a literary model for Luke's central section.¹⁰ Evans argued a few years later as follows:¹¹

⁹G. MacKinlay, "St. Luke's Threefold Narrative of Christ's Last Journey to Jerusalem." Interpreter, VII (1910-11) 261-78, cited in *ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰C. F. Evans, "Review of L'Evangile des voyages de Jesus," Journal of Theological Studies ns. 3 (1952) 242-6, cited in *ibid.*, 11.

¹¹C. F. Evans, "The Central Section of St. Luke's Gospel," Studies in the Gospels (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), 37-53.

(1) The opening sentence of Luke 9:51 contains a number of biblical idioms which are reminiscent of the style of the LXX. The most important word in this sentence, "analempsis," is found in another document, "Analempsis of Moses," whose subject matter is similar to the material found in the central section of Luke's gospel. He wrote,

If Luke knew of this work, then he will have been acquainted with a document which under the title of Analempsis comprised not only the passage of its subject from earth to heaven by a mysterious death, but also a series of addresses and injunctions delivered in Amman beyond Jordan to his successor whom he is leaving behind. This might go some way toward explaining why the evangelist, after an introduction in solemn biblical tones, chose to place under the head of an approaching analempsis not only the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus in or near Jerusalem, but also a mass of teaching: delivered in the course of a journey thither.¹²

(2) The material of this section is heterogeneous and the individual pericopae were originally independent of each other. But Luke selected and ordered his material with the intention of identifying Jesus as "the prophet like upon Moses" by composing this section in the form of a Christian Deuteronomy.

(3) The order of the subject matter in Luke 9:51-18:14 is similar to the order of the material in Deuteronomy. A few of the details of correspondence are as follows:

Deuteronomy 1 - Luke 10:1-3, 17-20

Deuteronomy 2 - 3:22 - Luke 10:4-16

¹²Ibid., 40.

Deuteronomy 5-6 - Luke 1-:25-27

Deuteronomy 13:1-11 - Luke 12:35-53

Deuteronomy 23:15-24:4 - Luke 16:1-18.

This theory does have some weaknesses according to Resseque.¹³ Deuteronomy 18:15 "the prophet like unto Moses" does not have a correspondence or parallel in the central section. Evans must substitute Luke 9:35 as a parallel for Deuteronomy 18:15. In addition, a number of the parallels are verbal rather than substantial, and no motive is suggested for this "quixotic" procedure.

A Literary Model: Rabbinic Influence

M. D. Goulder argues that Luke followed a common rabbinic method of constructing a sermon. To set out the themes of a sermon as points a, b, c, and then to expound them fully in reverse order c, b, a, was the common rabbinic method of constructing a sermon. This structure is present in the central section according to Goulder.¹⁴ The chiasmus includes three main themes of the journey: prayer, money, and repentance. Resseque points out that this chiastic structure is not obvious and is insignificant in comparison to the theme of discipleship.

¹³Resseque, 13.

¹⁴M. D. Goulder, "The Chiastic Structure of the Lucan Journey," Studia Evangelica (1964), 194-202, cited in *ibid*.

The Perean Section

Mark 10:1, "and he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan," is the point at which Luke begins the central section. On the basis of that "beyond the Jordan" probably refers to Perea, some prefer to call this Luke's Perean Section. G. L. Godet advanced such an argument on the basis of logical evidence.¹⁵ However, there is no intrinsic evidence in Luke to such a journey. Luke never refers to Perea or the Decapolis.

The Samaritan Section

R. H. Lightfoot calls 9:51-18:15 the Samaritan Section.¹⁶ Luke's intention was to link Galilee and Jerusalem by a section of equal significance and worth. There are certain "unobtrusive parrallelisms" between the Galilee section and the Samaritan section, i.e., Luke 4:16-30 - 9:51-56; 6:13ff-10:1ff; 6:1-11 - 11:53f, 14:1ff; 8:19ff-14:27; 6:17-49 - 12:1ff; 5:12ff-17:11ff.

E. Lohse argues for a Samaritan ministry fashioned by Luke with a theological motif.¹⁷ In 9:51-18:14 Luke demonstrated the beginning of a new chapter in salvation-history, a

¹⁵F. L. Godet, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Edinburgh: Clark, 1887), 6, cited in *ibid.*, 14.

¹⁶R. H. Lightfoot, Locality and Doctrine in the Gospels (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938) 137-39, cited in *ibid.*, 15.

¹⁷E. Lohse, "Missionarisches Handeln Jesu nach dem Evangelium des Lukas," Theologische Zeitschrift, 10 (1954) 1-13, cited in *ibid.*

ministry beyond the confines of Israel, which has a practical meaning for the church. But again, in this section there are few references to Samaria and the people encountered in these chapters would not have been in Samaria.

A Literary Device

C. C. McCown argues that the travel narrative appears to be a literary device used by Luke to hold the reader's attention.¹⁸ The teachings of Jesus are collected to throw them under the light reflected from the tragedy which was just ahead and the triumph which would inevitably follow.

Theological: Theology of the Ascension

J. H. Davies says there is a relationship between Luke's journey narrative and his theology of the ascension.¹⁹ Luke 9:51 not only refers to the ascension but also to the series of events which preceded the ascension. Luke's use of the Elijah-Moses typology brings this out in the open because both Moses and Elijah went on a journey before the assumption itself. This is also a link between Jesus' going up to Jerusalem and his death and ascension. See 13:31-35; 18:31-34. Luke then sees

¹⁸C. C. McCown, "The Geography of Luke's Central Section," Journal of Biblical Literature, 57 (1938) 57, cited in *ibid.*, 16.

¹⁹J. H. Davies, "The Purpose of the Central Section of St. Luke's Gospel," Studia Evangelica, 2 (1964) 164-69, cited in *ibid.*, 17-18.

the journey as the first part of that ascent to heaven via death and resurrection which he terms Jesus' analepsis.

Theological: Christological Motif

Hans Conzelmann argues that Luke sees the story of salvation in three stages:²⁰

- (1) the period of Israel (LK. 16:16)
- (2) the period of Jesus' ministry (LK. 4:16ff., Acts 10:38); and
- (3) the period since the Ascension during which the virtue of patience is required as the disciples of Jesus look forward to the Parousia. The Parousia is the end of saving history.

Jesus Christ is the centre of history with the Creation and the Parousia at either end. Between these limits history runs its course in three phases:

- (i) the period of Israel, of the Law and the Prophets.
- (ii) the period of Jesus, which gives a foretaste of future salvation.
- (iii) the period between the coming of Jesus and his Parousia, in other words, the period of the church and of the Spirit. This is the last age and we are not told it will be short.²¹

Conzelmann asserts that the journey narrative is used for an explicit christological motif. Even though the journey

²⁰Hans Conzelmann, The Theology of St. Luke (New York: Harper & Row, 1961) 16-17.

²¹Ibid., 150.

motif is found in Mark, Luke is the first to develop it into a schema. Not only this, but the motif of misunderstanding is imposed upon the journey material by Luke. Luke turns Mark's messianic secret into a misunderstanding of the Passion.²² The disciples believe that Jesus' approach to Jerusalem is the Parousia instead of the Passion. Luke's purpose is to show the changed emphasis in Jesus' ministry. He was going to Jerusalem not for Parousia but to suffer.

F. Schutz argues that the theme of suffering and rejection is found throughout Luke's Gospel.²³ There is a variety of themes in the central section. Schutz states that Luke allows Jesus to travel to Jerusalem in order to establish his claim of full power of authority in the temple.²⁴

Helmut Flender offers a different christological interpretation of the central section.²⁵ He sees a dialectical structure in Luke rather than Conzelmann's unilinear salvation-historical pattern of Luke-Acts. Characteristic of the dialectical pattern is complementary, climatic and antithetical parallelism. The travel narrative exhibits this antithetical christological pattern by contrasting the suffering and

²²Ibid., 56.

²³F. Schutz, Der leidende Christus (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1969) cited in *ibid.*, 18.

²⁴Ibid., 19.

²⁵Helmut Flender, St. Luke, Theologian of Redemptive History (London: SPCK, 1967) cited in *ibid.*

glorification of Christ.²⁶ The second function of the travel narrative is to demonstrate the relation between the Christian message and the world.

C. H. Talbert claims that Luke joined the journey to Jerusalem with the ascension for a christological purpose: the continuity between the Ascended One and the Crucified One is guaranteed by the presence of witnesses who accompanied Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem.²⁷ These witnesses serve to counteract docetic claims.

Theological: Authenticated Witness

W. C. Robinson, Jr. argues that the travel narrative serves Luke's "concept of authenticated witness, on which he saw the life and ministry of the Christian church based."²⁸ The final editor of Luke created the trip motif and imposed it upon the travel narrative to subserve his view of Heilsgeschichte, which he conceived as a "way."²⁹ In Acts the Christian movement is called "the Way" 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22. The course of the narration is like a way. "The

²⁶Luke 9:51-56; 13:41-43.

²⁷C. H. Talbert, "An Anti-Gnostic Tendency in Lucan Christology," New Testament Studies, 14 (1967-68) 259-71, cited in Resseguie, 20.

²⁸W. C. Robinson, Jr., "The Theological Context for Interpreting Luke's Travel Narrative, 9:51ff.," Journal of Biblical Literature, 79 (1960) 20-31, cited in *ibid.*, 20-21.

²⁹Luke 13:33.

way" is understood theologically in terms of God's purpose. The whole way of Jesus is placed under the divine purpose - a way which leads to the Gentiles and may be entitled: "The Way of the Lord." "Luke-Acts was written to enhance the asphaleia (Luke 1:4) of the church's legitimacy and of the believer's faith by showing that the Christian church is based on the apostolic witness and has its place within the plan of God."³⁰

A Logical Order

Some scholars believe that Luke's arrangement of pericopae is logical with no overarching motif present. N. Geldenhuys says that Luke follows an aesthetic and local order. "It's uncertain whether he is writing about one and the same journey to Jerusalem all the time."³¹ R. T. A. Murphy recognizes a logical order with such groupings as artificially assembled polemical discourses (11:14-14:24), vocation sayings (9:57-62); privileges granted disciples (10:17-24); instructions on prayer (11:1-13); parables on divine mercy (15:1-32); good and bad use of wealth (16:1-15, 16-31); social virtues (17:1-19); sayings about the Law that are clearly out of context (16:16-18); sayings about the end-time and the "Day" of the son of man

³⁰Robinson, 27-28, cited in Resseguie, 21.

³¹Norval Geldenhuys, Commentary On The Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) 293, cited in *ibid.*, 22.

(17:20-18:8); sayings about humility and detachment linked to the third prediction of the Passion (18:9-34).³²

P. M. J. Lagrange argues that the Central Section contains the teachings of Jesus and that they are arranged in order by groups. These groups are: the kingdom of God proclaimed (9:41-10:24); episodes (10:25-42); the prayer of the new community and effectiveness of prayer (11:1-13); the signs sufficient for a right spirit (11:14-36) which are rejected by others (11:37-54); a sermon concerning salvation (12:1-59); the historical destiny of the kingdom of God and the reprobation of Israel (13:1-35); dinner episodes (14:1-24); requirements for discipleship (14:25-35); goodness of God for sinners (15:1-32); employment of wealth (16:1-31); various opinions (17:1-10); the pericope of the ten lepers (17:11-19); men and judgment (17:20-37); prayer (18:1-14); and pericopae of the infants and of the rich (18:15-30).³³

A Practical Section for Church Needs:
Ecclesiastical-Ethical Motif

Vincent Taylor writes that Luke made use of existing groups of traditions which were compiled "for the guidance of individual missionaries on such topics as the charge of Jesus

³²R. T. A. Murphy, "Gospel According to St. Luke," New Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967) 8: 1069, cited in *ibid.*, 22.

³³P. M. J. Lagrange, Evangile selon Saint Luc (Paris: Gabalda, 1948) XXXviii-Xli., cited in *ibid.*

to his disciples, prayer, miracles, wealth, forgiveness, and mammon."³⁴

Likewise, Bo Reicke suggests that the numerous traditions which are intended to be instructive for Christian missionaries raises the question "whether Christ is not described here as being on a pilgrimage toward suffering and glorification, because such pilgrimage is the lot of his messengers on this earth."³⁵

Johannes Schneider isolates the Grundmotiv of this section which is referred to in 9:51, 13:22, 17:1, 18:31, and 19:11 as the "journey to Jerusalem."³⁶ Luke does not refer to definite places and times in the travel narrative. This is due to Luke's conscious effort, not his sources.³⁷ By utilizing generalities Luke has gathered together didactic-paraeletic material to be used as particular models for the disciples. The material was to be used for the future missionary activity of the disciples. Luke wanted to show the community and its leaders how they were to live and act according to the will of

³⁴Vincent Taylor, "Luke," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962) K-Q:182.

³⁵Bo Reicke, "Instruction and Discussion in the Travel Narrative," Studia Evangelica I (1959) 206-216, cited in Resseguie, 24.

³⁶Johannes Schneider, "Zur Analyse des lukanischen Reiseberichtes," in Synoptische Studien (München: Zink, 1953) 207-27, cited in *ibid.*, 23.

³⁷Luke 9:51, 56; 13:22; 14:1, 25.

Jesus.

E. Earl Ellis suggests that the Central Section has a teaching function.³⁸ 9:51-19:44 represents the messianic "teachings" which are separated from the earlier messianic "acts" of the Galilean mission (4:31-9:50). The Central Section may be grouped into six sections. (1) "The Meaning and Reception of the Kingdom Message" 9:51-10:42. (2) "Teachings on Prayer, Exorcism, the Kingdom and Power" 11:1-12:34. (3) and (4) "The Kingdom and the Judgment" 12:35-13:21 and "Who will enter the Kingdom" 13:22-16:13. (5) and (6) "Coming of the Kingdom" 16:14-18:14, and "Recipients of the Kingdom" 18:15-19:44.

Theological and Practical: Christological and Ecclesiastical-Ethical Motifs

Walter Grundmann argues that Luke has substituted the secret of the suffering of the Messiah for Mark's messianic secret.³⁹ Jesus discloses his messiahship through suffering. The journey motif is also used to disclose Jesus as a traveling prophet-teacher who is destined to be Messiah and who instructs his disciples on discipleship.

Peter von der Osten-Sacken accepts a christological

³⁸E. Earl Ellis, The Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 146-150.

³⁹Walter Grundmann, "Fragen der Komposition des lukanischen Reiseberichts," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, 50-51 (1959-60) 252-270, cited in Resseguie, 26.

interpretation of the travel narrative, but Luke has joined the christological with the ecclesiastical in an insoluble unity, says von der Osten-Sacken.⁴⁰ "Not limited to the findings of Conzelman, he has extended the christological function to include not only Jesus' consciousness of suffering, but also his consciousness of glory. More than that von der Osten-Sacken has done justice to the didactic and paraenetic material by placing it within the framework of Luke's intention to train church leaders and missionaries."⁴¹

David Gill states that Luke intentionally links together Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and proper discipleship.⁴² He writes, "Jesus' journey is a type of a Christian life, but more than that, as a journey toward suffering it gives a rationale for the difficult things in the living of the Christian life, the things that are the biggest stumbling blocks and causes of misunderstanding for the community here and now."⁴³

Conclusion by Resseque

Resseque came to three conclusions. First, Luke has

⁴⁰Peter von der Osten-Sacken "Zur Christologie des lukanischen Reiseberichts," Evangelische Theologie, 33 (1973) 476-96, cited in *ibid.*, 28.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 29.

⁴²David Gill, "Observations on the Luken Travel Narrative and Some Related Passages," Harvard Theological Review, 63 (1970) 199-221.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 214.

in mind Jesus' last journey to Jerusalem. This is made clear by two points: (1) Once Jesus heads southward for Jerusalem, Luke never hints at a journey back to Galilee; and (2) "analempsis" refers to the whole chain of events in Jesus' life from earth to heaven---his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Second, Luke is not concerned to offer a chronicle of the journey of Jesus. Third, the content of the central section, with its numerous teaching-pieces, supports the contention that Jesus is presented here as the Teacher on the way to Jerusalem. Equally as important is the christological theme of Jesus as a suffering Messiah---a messiahship which is misunderstood throughout the central section. After reviewing the scholarship, Resseguie concludes, "but the important problem as to why Luke has gathered together this material into the central part of his gospel remains unsolved. Until this problem is solved the enigma of the central section is still with us."⁴⁴

Research Since 1974

James A. Sanders-1974

Sanders advanced C. F. Evans' argument that Luke attempted to write a Christian Deuteronomy. However, Evans had not gone far enough. He did not say why Luke had done so.

⁴⁴Resseguie, 34-36.

Sanders believes he has discovered Luke's purpose in following Deuteronomy. He argues that Luke can be read as presenting Jesus as delivering a prophetic critique against false assumptions about election. "Such is the theme of the whole Central Section: The Deuteronomic ethic of election has been subverted."⁴⁵

This project is an effort to use Sanders' insight into Luke's purpose in the Central Section of his Gospel and to preach a series of sermons from it using the hermeneutic of prophetic critique. John Bligh has attempted to follow Evans' thesis in a series of chapel sermons.⁴⁶ They demonstrate the difficulty in working out the relationship between Deuteronomy and Luke.

A. J. Hultgren-1976

Hultgren says the second subdivision of the Gospel (9:51-19:44) portrays the Days of Consolidation and Division in Israel.⁴⁷ He notes there are few temporal references in the section. Those that are there are general. 13:32f gives the impression that the whole account is cast within a few

⁴⁵James A. Sanders, "The Ethic of Election in Luke's Great Banquet Parable," in Essays in Old Testament Ethics (New York: KTAV, 1974) 258.

⁴⁶John Bligh, Christian Deuteronomy: Scripture for Meditation, Luke 9-18 (New York: Alba House, 1975).

⁴⁷A. J. Hultgren, "Interpreting the Gospel of Luke," Interpretation 30 (1976) 353-365.

day's time. The journey to Jerusalem is portrayed as a decisive moment---the days just prior to the final events (from crucifixion to ascension). Attention is focused on Jerusalem as the goal (9:51, 53; 13:22, 33f.; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11) so that the cross, resurrection, and ascension are anticipated. The whole section sets forth thematic motifs which fall into two categories: instruction for Jesus' disciples as forerunners of the new community within Israel (hence, consolidation) and disputation with opponents (hence, division). The section is almost entirely didactic and polemical. There are twenty parables on discipleship. Also, there are conflict stories. The fact that the section portrays Jesus as on his way to his suffering and death indicates also that Jesus is equipping his disciples for carrying on his work after his death and resurrection.

John Drury-1976

Drury follows C. F. Evans in suggesting that Luke, in his central section, wrote a Christian Deuteronomy. In commenting upon Luke 9 and 10 he wrote, "These incidents mark the beginning of the most grandiose of Luke's Old Testament exercises, his Christian version of Deuteronomy which extends to 18:14."⁴⁸ In chapter 7 he asks,

⁴⁸ John Drury, Tradition & Design in Luke's Gospel (London: Darton & Todd, 1976) 68.

So what is Luke up to from 9:51 to 18:14? The only certain answer has been that he is not editing Mark. The section is made of Matthean material mixed with his own. Deuteronomy is Luke's model, the template which determines the position of pieces within the whole. It exercises the same power as Mark in other long sections: less overtly but just as continuously.⁴⁹

He argues,

This section is a Christian Deuteronomy---a handbook on the Christian life in the historical setting of a journey to Jerusalem, just as Deuteronomy is a guide for the devout Jew set in the historical perspective of the journey into the promised land with Jerusalem, the place where God will cause his name to dwell, as its centre. Like Deuteronomy it deals with discipleship within a settled secular milieu and is pervaded by the note of joy. Deuteronomy is the string on to which Luke threads teaching material from Matthew and from his resources.⁵⁰

Drury misses the election motif which Sanders emphasizes.

Drury asserts that one of Luke's purposes is to present Jesus as a prophet and as the historical culmination of the old prophetic tradition. He argues that C. F. Evans saw this as Luke's purpose as well, i.e., Jesus as the fulfillment of Dt. 18:18. He suggests that the Moses and Elijah motif of Malachi 4:4-5 are woven together by Luke. "Jesus is, for Luke just such a new moral leader and just such a prophet of the end. He makes it concrete by giving him some of the characteristics of Moses and Elijah as his antetypes."⁵¹

⁴⁹Ibid., 138-139.

⁵⁰Ibid., 140.

⁵¹Ibid., 147.

Paul J. Bernadicou, S.J.-1977

Bernadicou argues that the journey to Jerusalem shows Jesus' way to glorification through inevitable suffering. As he moves along this way, Jesus teaches his disciples what in turn will be expected of them and he binds them into a community by reason of their intimacy with him.⁵² He states that the first section of the travel narrative (9:51-11:13) sketches the main lines of Luke's spirituality and ascetical practices for the Christian life. He argues that the "travels" of Jesus have a uniquely Lucan quality. Like that of "guest," it is a Christological category for Luke (9:56f; 10:1, 38; 11:37; 14:1; 14:1f; 19:5). The travel references are clearly redactional additions. They, as Conzelman says, contain the clearest indication by which we can recognize Luke's own composition and see what is his special interest. Bernadicou addresses such subjects as the Cost of Discipleship 9:57-62; the Mission of the Seventy 10:1-20; the Joy of Jesus 10:21-24; the Law of Love 10:25-37; the Priority of Hearing the Word of God 10:38-42; 11:27-28; and the Teaching on Prayer 11:1-13.

I. Howard Marshall-1978

Marshall, in his excellent commentary suggests

⁵²Paul S. Bernadicou, "The Spirituality of Luke's Travel Narrative," Review for Religious 36:3 (1977) 455-66.

that the basic structure of 9:51-19:10 is the same as Mark 10:1-52.⁵³ Jesus is on a journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. This same motif appears in Luke, but on a much greater scale. The main content of the section is teaching given by Jesus, and there is little in the way of action and mighty works. The main theme is Jesus the teacher of his disciples. Marshall believes the section rightly ends at 19:10. In regard to the "journey" theme, he argues that Jesus is portrayed throughout the Gospel as a traveler and that the only difference in the Central Section is that Jerusalem is the goal. Apparently, Luke has taken over the journey motif from his sources because of its usefulness. It afforded him a useful framework for the material which he includes in the Gospel. Above all, Luke is able to stress that Jerusalem is from now onwards the goal of Jesus. The whole section is to be seen in the context of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. "Jerusalem becomes a symbol of this fact; the reader too is able to penetrate the symbolism, since he knows what lies ahead, although the original disciples remained in the dark."⁵⁴

The real importance of the section lies in the teaching given by Jesus. Marshall has difficulty in defining the general themes. There is no common thread running through

⁵³I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 400-403.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 401.

the Section. There does seem to be teaching for both disciples (9:51-10:24; 10:25-11:13) and opponents (11:14-54).

He concludes:

The difficulty of tracing a logical progression through the section may well be due to the nature of the material as it reached Luke. He was governed by what he found in his sources. We have three stages in composition---the composition of the sources, the combining of the sources, and Luke's editing of the combined source---and the unravelling of such a process is likely to be extremely conjectural.⁵⁵

Arthur Kent-1979

Arthur Kent's detailed study of Deuteronomy and Luke goes a long way toward proving the theses of C. F. Evans, James A. Sanders, and John Drury.⁵⁶ In a text by text study of Deuteronomy and Luke's central section, Kent has shown that Luke followed Deuteronomy not only in the use of identical language, but with thematic similarities.

In a few places the Lukan blocks of material are paralleled in very broad strokes, but more frequently in verse by verse or even phrase by phrase parallels. Sometimes the briefest of texts in Deuteronomy will be used to allude to large portions of material in Exodus or Numbers which Luke uses in his pattern.⁵⁷

⁵⁵Ibid., 402.

⁵⁶Arthur Kent, "The Christian Deuteronomy," (Unpublished School of Theology at Claremont, research paper for James A. Sanders, May 4, 1979)

⁵⁷Ibid., 106.

David L. Tiede-1980

In 1980 David Tiede published his book on Luke-Acts.⁵⁸ His discussion of the central section (9:51-18:14) affirms the travel narrative as one of the distinctive literary devices of the Bible. Jesus is "on the way" to Jerusalem. His prolonged approach to Jerusalem provides occasion for elaborate treatment of the themes of faithful discipleship between the pointed reminders of the goal, i.e., Jerusalem. "The section also strikes a distinctive balance between purposive or even urgent movement toward the end and the attending to a host of needs and homely matters of faithful practice along the way."⁵⁹

Tiede has also followed the lead of Evans and Sanders in seeing the close correspondence to the book of Deuteronomy in Luke's Central Section. However, he argues the fit is not exact.

The narrative genre of the gospel would itself preclude any simple imitation of Moses' parting catechesis of Israel. Some of the correlations with Deuteronomy are still so general that they could be fortuitous or automatic to any account of the departing leader's preparation of the people. The hellenistic model of the wandering philosopher and his disciples would certainly have come to mind for many first century readers. Thus, reference to this section of Luke as a "Christian Deuteronomy" may often only be a comment about its ethical counsel in comparison with other farewell discourses,

⁵⁸David L. Tiede, Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

⁵⁹Ibid., 57.

testaments, or instructions to disciples "on the way."⁶⁰

However, Tiede feels the case is stronger for Luke structuring 9:51-18:14 after Deuteronomy 1-26. Like Evans and Sanders, he suggests that there is a striking resemblance between Luke-Acts and the "Testament of Moses."

Certainly Moses the faithful prophet who intercedes and suffers on behalf of his people and whose prophecy attests to the primordial divine plan in Israel's history represents a midrashic adaptation of Deuteronomy that illuminates Luke's appropriation of the same scriptural traditions.⁶¹

Tiede asserts that what comes into view in the Central Section is an "ongoing hermeneutical debate" concerning Israel's faithfulness to Moses' instruction, upon which Israel's continuing election depends. The primary impact of Luke 9:51-56 and the opening chapters of Deuteronomy is in its careful appropriation of an authoritative scriptural tradition to promote a contested view.

It is Moses the prophet, teacher, and ruler of Israel who provides the paradigm for Luke's presentation of Jesus: that is, the long-suffering Moses who prepares his people to "go" on the "way" before "the face" of the Lord after his departure, who sends the twelve men on ahead, one from each tribe, and who appoints seventy elders to share his spirit. Taken once again together with the figure of Elijah the prophet, Luke's Jesus is disclosed in awesome proportions of authority.⁶²

In addition, Tiede sees Jesus' "setting his face" to

⁶⁰Ibid., 58.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., 60-61.

Jerusalem as a metaphor for the prophetic vocation as in Ezekiel's mission to Jerusalem (Ezek. 21:2; 21:1). Tiede has been influenced by Craig A. Evans' Claremont graduate seminar paper on Luke 9:51-54 and cites it in his book.⁶³

So Professor Tiede concludes,

Whether it can be established that this introduction to a "Christian Deuteronomy" has been intentionally "enriched" by an allusion to the servant songs or Ezekiel, it is clear that as Luke presents this encounter, Jesus is rejected on precisely the terms in which his firm resolve has been expressed. The rejection of Jesus is thus programmatic, a second archetypal encounter in which the prophet's mission in obedience to the divine will stands at odds with the people's willingness to concur. Faithfulness to the authoritative tradition is defined by the reception of this prophet and his mission, and the specifically Samaritan grounds of the refusal are only of secondary interest. Without the gift of repentance, neither the Jews nor the Samaritans could be part of restored Israel from which the mission to the Gentiles proceeds. The refusal of the prophet like Moses constitutes and reveals the grievous apostasy of both the Jews and the Samaritans.⁶⁴

Later in his book, Tiede argues that to see Luke as a "Christian Deuteronomy" makes it clear that Luke's story must not be reduced to a simple series of "proof texts" in an attack upon the Jews.⁶⁵ He asserts that a wooden "Heilsgeschichte" reading of the "Travel Narrative" falls easy prey to such reductionism. This is exemplified in Helmuth L. Egelkraut. "Once Jerusalem falls there is no longer an Israel,

⁶³Ibid., 61.

⁶⁴Ibid., 61-63.

⁶⁵Ibid., 76.

but a host of Jews who gather in their synagogues but lack any visible center."⁶⁶

Since this persistent effort of the apostles is persistently answered with hostility, it can only mean two things: First, the Jews are a totally hopeless case. Second: Luke wants to show in historical categories how Israel, once it was rejected (Travel Narrative), systematically excluded itself from salvation and is thus no longer the legitimate guardian of God's revelation.⁶⁷

The allusions to Deuteronomy are not incidental to his literary purposes. Therefore, one dare not use Luke as a basis for antisemitism.

Tiede follows Larrimore C. Crockett in suggesting that Jews and Gentiles living and eating together is an eschatological sign of the Spirit's activity.⁶⁸ Crockett has shown, according to Tiede, that Luke has combined Isaiah 61 and 58 as a way of demonstrating that they apply to the program of the church which embraces both Jews and Gentiles in table fellowship. Crockett writes,

By the technique of enriching, Is. 58:6-7, which in its own context is an exhortation to social justice, becomes material to fill out the meaning of the illusion to the messianic banquet in Is. 61:6. In this way, the phrase "good news to the poor," comes to have very concrete meaning and at the same time takes on the connotation

⁶⁶Helmuth L. Egelkraut, "Jesus' Mission to Jerusalem: A redaction-Critical Study of the Travel Narrative in the Gospel of Luke, Luke 9:51-19:48," Europäische Hochschulschriften, ser. 80 (1976) 218, cited in *ibid.*, 145.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 229, cited in Tiede, 145.

⁶⁸Tiede, 52.

of the messianic banquet.⁶⁹

Tiede goes on to show that this concern is further developed in the treatment of the strange assemblage of persons who are "invited" or "chosen" to participate in table fellowship by Jesus. "Thus, Jesus' prophetic critique insists on the inclusion of the Gentiles in table fellowship against any narrow concept of the elect."⁷⁰

⁶⁹Larrimore C. Crockett, "The Old Testament in the Gospel of Luke." (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, Brown University, 1961) 282, cited in *ibid.*, 52.

⁷⁰Tiede, 53.

CHAPTER II

LUKE-ACTS AS INTERPRETED
BY JAMES A. SANDERS

Dr. James A. Sanders is the President of the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center for Preservation and Research, and Professor of Intertestamental and Biblical Studies at the Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, California. In addition to his publications listed in the bibliography, in 1981 he was featured in a video-tape series entitled Luke-The Theological Historian.¹ In the season of Lent 1982, this writer used this seven part video series produced by the United Methodist Communications Board. It has proven to be a most helpful tool in teaching Luke-Acts to about twenty-five of our key lay leaders. In this series, Dr. Sanders not only teaches Luke-Acts, but also introduces his hermeneutical methodology for all biblical interpretation. This chapter will follow the outline of the video series in presenting Dr. Sanders' approach to Luke-Acts and to hermeneutics.

Tape Number One: Luke's Way
of Reading His Scripture

Dr. Sanders asserts that Luke in his Gospel and Acts intended to write a history of the work of God in the world,

¹James A. Sanders, Luke-The Theological Historian (Nashville: United Methodist Communication Board, 1981).

specifically in Christ and in the Early Church, as a continuation of and climatic chapter in the ongoing work of God since creation. In so doing, Luke provided us with the most orderly account we have of the work of God in the first century. In the prologue of his Gospel, Luke 1:1-4, Luke refers to the "things which have been accomplished among us." "These things" are the works of God in and through Jesus of Nazareth. But "these things" according to Dr. Sanders' stretch all the way back to the moment of creation and point toward "the things" that God is continuing to do in history. The whole Bible is God's story and this story has been delivered to us "by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word." Luke saw himself as one of the continuing eyewitnesses to what God was doing in his time and challenges us all to join him in becoming "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" in our time.

But if we are to see God's action in our own history and in the history of the world our eyes and minds must be opened by the Scriptures. "The Scriptures" for Luke were the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. These Scriptures, as illumined by the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth, had enabled Luke and his church to see and hear. If the Scriptures were Luke's key to reality, then they are also for us. Our task is to discover how Luke read his Scriptures. "This question of how is a question of hermeneutic; we must

first identify Luke's hermeneutic so that we can assume his interpretive point of view in our reading of Luke-Acts."²

In his article on "Hermeneutics," Dr. Sanders gives us a definition of hermeneutics.

From the Greek *ἑρμηνεία* meaning interpretation, translation, or explanation; the Greek verb in the biblical period also meant to proclaim or discourse upon a topic. As used today it signifies 1) the principles, rules, and techniques whereby the interpreter of a text attempts to understand it in its original context; 2) the science of discerning how a thought or event in one cultural context may be understood in a different cultural context; and 3) the art of making the transfer.³

Central to Sanders' thesis is that Luke used a theocentric hermeneutic and so must we if we are to understand the points Luke originally scored. In reading Luke's text we ask, "What is God doing in this situation?" Sanders assumes that "theology is hermeneutics and hermeneutics is theology." "The first and most important hermeneutic is one's view of God, or one's view of reality."⁴ In the sermons preached at the Presbyterian Church in Laguna Beach, this question has been central. We have asked, "What does this text say God is doing?" The sermons have emphasized that God is one in all ways and that God is also the God of All and not just of us Presbyterians. God is God; hence he is free and cannot be

²Ibid., 21.

³James A. Sanders, "Hermeneutics," Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976) Suppl. vol., 402.

⁴Sanders, Luke, 21.

limited or defined by any of our denominational labels.

Luke's theocentric hermeneutic combines the concepts of the freedom of God and the grace of God in a dynamic blend of creator/redeemer of all people. It is important that these concepts be held in balance or in tension: to overemphasize God's freedom results in an ungrounded universalism; to overemphasize God's grace leads to denominationalism. Luke repeatedly warns against a self-serving interpretation of the doctrine of election (salvation) which assumes, as did the Pharisees, assurance of God's grace. God is free, Luke insists, both to challenge and to extend blessing-to any person or group.⁵

The second hermeneutical principle that Sanders affirms in the first videotape is that of dynamic analogy. What he means is that in reading the Gospel of Luke we identify ourselves with our dynamic equivalents. Being members of the religious establishment, we identify with the congregation in Jesus' hometown synagogue at Nazareth. Or, we identify with the elder brother in Luke 15. To get the power of Jesus' message we must learn to identify with the bad guys of the story rather than the good. If we always identify ourselves with Joseph, Jeremiah, and Jesus we shall never hear the points originally scored. "In our reading of Scripture we are to attempt to identify with those in the passage who are our counterparts, whether that is the Jewish religious establishment (priests and Pharisees), the ninety-nine abandoned sheep, the sleeping disciples, or Judas."⁶

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

Tape Number Two: Eyewitnesses
and Servants of the Word

Luke theologizes rather than moralizes. In his article on "Hermeneutics," Sanders writes,

One must read the Bible theologically before reading it morally. The primary meaning of redemption is that God has caught up human sinfulness into his plans. This theologem pervades the Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, and so all texts must be understood theologically (in the light of that theologem before any indication for obedience be drawn from it.⁷

"To theologize means to ask first what the text indicates God is doing in a situation, instead of making moral judgments about the characters in the passage or asking what the text says we should do (i.e. moralizing)."⁸ In reading the Bible in this manner we are given hope. If God can work in the midst of sinful human circumstances, then he may be able to reach into our lives and work with us too.

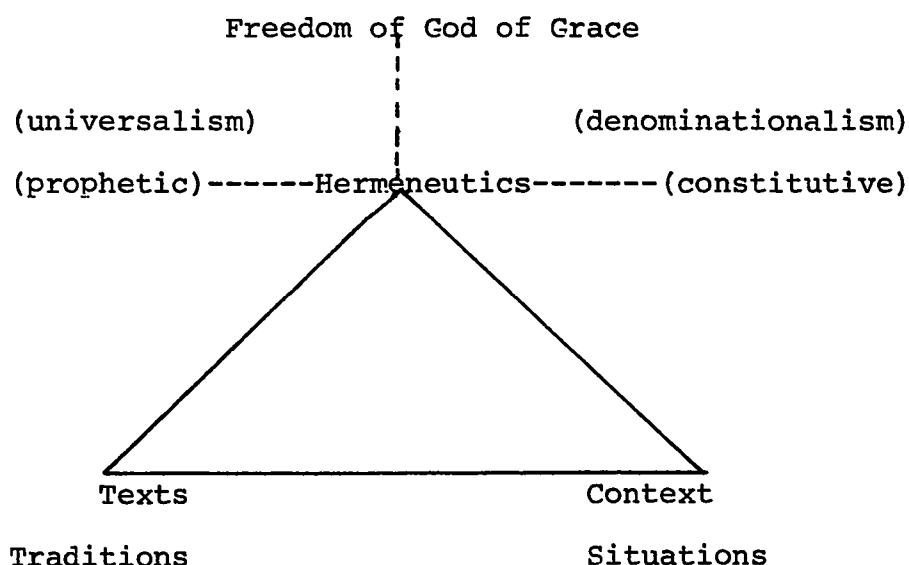
For Luke, the emphasis upon "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" is central. God will have "eyewitnesses" whether or not the church responds. An "eyewitness" is one who sees and understands what God is doing in the world. For Luke, there were three categories of eyewitnesses: negative (religious establishment), neutral (the disciples), positive (angels, demons, women, stones, etc.). In the infancy narratives, Luke underscores the importance of what he saw going

⁷Sanders, "Hermeneutics," 404.

⁸Sanders, Luke, 21.

on in his first century world. "The point is clear: God is doing it again, and we had better realize it - with God, nothing is impossible."⁹

At this point of tape two, Dr. Sanders introduced his triangle on the chalkboard. It is the same as he used in his book God Has A Story Too.¹⁰ It is as follows:



In interpreting Luke we begin with the text, in this case, a written text or tradition that had an original meaning within its original context. We attempt to interpret that text by theologizing---by asking what God is doing in that situation.

To move, then, to what point is being made to and for us, we must use dynamic analogy; that is, we must identify with our counterpart in that situation (not with the heroes

⁹Ibid., 22.

¹⁰James A. Sanders, God Has A Story Too (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 17.

or Jesus) and hear what the story says from that standpoint in order to understand and be faithful to its intended meaning.¹¹

In studying the Bible, Sanders has discovered it's own hermeneutics. In his introduction to God Has A Story Too, he argues that in each successive stage of biblical history the Bible writers were re-presenting older traditions. Constantly, the later writers were adapting the earlier traditions to make them relevant to their new situations. Sometimes in a New Testament passage there are rather full citations of an Old Testament passage but often the text has been modified and altered by the New Testament author to suit his or her argument. Sometimes the New Testament author simply used a text of the Old Testament different from those we have, but more often than not the later author actually adapted the older text to the new purposes. The Bible itself has two major hermeneutics. (1) The hermeneutic of prophetic critique which emphasizes God's freedom as Creator of all the world and of all humankind. This hermeneutic is theocentric and tends to universalism. The biblical writers often use prophetic critique to call into question the believers understanding of election. (2) Constitutive hermeneutics emphasizes God's grace and commitment to the promises made as the peculiar and particular Redeemer of one ongoing community or group. This hermeneutic is christocentric. In the Old Testament this hermeneutic is

¹¹Sanders, Luke, 22.

expressed in the "royal," "establishment" theology of the Davidic Covenant.

The genius of the Bible is that it holds these two hermeneutics in tension. This is an expression of the Bible's pluralism and inherent ambiguity. Not only is the Bible stable, but also it is adaptable. Sometimes God's people needed to hear the challenge of God's freedom and have their election questioned. In other contexts they needed to hear the comfort of God's grace. Indeed, in reading texts the interpreter must live in this tension of the freedom of the God of grace. The distinction between true and false prophecy in the Old Testament is revealed in erring to one side of the triangle or the other.

Also we are to read the Bible with honesty, humility and humor. Honesty means letting Scripture say what it says and not what we want it to say. In reading the Scripture we recognize the fact that much of the Bible celebrates God's grace working in and through human sin and weakness. As we theologize first, we are set free to see what God is doing in the story and we can tolerate the fact that the biblical characters were not plastic saints, but real humans like us in whose lives God worked. After we have theologized, we can then moralize and ask what the passage indicates we might do to shape our society and live in the light of God's activity. But also we read the Scripture with humility which means that we identify in the stories, reports, and parables with those with

whom we might not otherwise identify. This is the principle of dynamic analogy. Humor means that in reading the biblical texts we take God a little more seriously than usual and ourselves a little less so. In reading the Bible, we as the covenant community discover who we are and what we ought to do in the contexts of our lives. The Bible's canonical form has shaped the church's identity and enabled it to survive.

Tape Number Three: Jesus' Way of Teaching
and Preaching Scripture

It was through reading his Scriptures, the Greek Old Testament, that Luke knew what God was doing in his day, in and through Jesus of Nazareth and the early church. Especially is this true as we read Luke 24:13-35, the Emmaus road story. The unrecognized, resurrected Christ joins two sad disciples on their way from the capital. In hearing their conversation and discussion, Christ asks the two concerning their conversation. They are amazed that he does not know what has happened in Jerusalem in the last few days. Jesus asks, "What things?" In response, they gave a factual account of "the things," "the happenings." It is clear that they still did not see what God had done in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he

interpreted to them (ἀπερμήνευεν αὐτοῖς) in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."¹² Later when they finally recognized him in the breaking of bread, they recalled how their hearts had burned within them as he opened (διήνοιξεν) to them the Scriptures. Even later, when Jesus stood among his disciples in Jerusalem, he opened their minds (διήνοιξεν αὐτῶν τὸν νοῦν τοῦ συνιέναι τὰς γραφάς) to understand the Scriptures. According to Sanders, the point that Luke is making is that only Scripture can open our eyes and cause us to see God's activity in Christ and in our world today. Luke's purpose is to help turn us all into "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" as we go out into the world in mission. This is why we are elect, i.e. to be witnesses and servants of the word. Any doctrine of election that claims we are God's exclusive children even though we remain spiritually blind is a tragic misreading of Scripture. What the church needs is a way of reading Scripture so as to see what God is about and the mission to which he calls us.

Luke 4:16-30 is a perfect illustration of how Jesus and Luke read their Scripture. Clearly they read it differently than Jesus' hometown synagogue. Sanders suggests that it was Jesus' interpretation of Scripture, his hermeneutic, which turned the congregation against him and which set him in conflict with the Jewish religious community of his day, leading

¹²Luke 24:25-27.

ultimately to his crucifixion. The religious community read their Scripture emphasizing the God of grace and blessed assurance. Jesus emphasized the freedom of the God of grace warning his people that if they refused to see, believe, and become witnesses to God's activity in their time, then God would raise up "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" even from the stones. We hear this as a prophetic challenge to the church. God is not a Presbyterian. Nor is God a Christian. God is free and he will have his elect servant people and the only question is: Will we be his elect? Only if we read the Scripture "as a paradigm, first of the verbs and nouns of God's activities and speech, and then, thereupon a putative paradigm of the verbs and nouns of our activities and speech, in our own time and in our context."¹³ Very simply we are "blessed to be a blessing" and if we are not that blessing, God will have others who will be. God is one; God is free.

Tape Number Four: Luke, The
Christian Deuteronomist

Following C. F. Evans, Sanders argues that Luke structured the central section of his gospel (9:51-18:14) on the basis of key words (in Greek) found in Deuteronomy 1-26. Deuteronomy was found in the form of a scroll in 621 BCE, as reported in 2 Kings 22. After it was found by workmen in the

¹³Sanders, God, 25.

Temple it was read to King Josiah who tore his clothes in the ancient act of mourning and despair associated with lamentation and grief. "Deuteronomy purports to be a record of Moses' own words just before he died, a sort of last will and testament."¹⁴

When King Hezekiah died in 687 B.C., he was succeeded by Manasseh, who reigned for about forty-five years under Assyrian dominance. Sanders suggests that both Hezekiah and Manasseh accommodated to the task of survival under Assyrian rule. Therefore, Assyrian influence became a major feature of Judah's life in the long years from 701 to 621 B.C., including, apparently, rampant polytheism. Also there was a large Canaanitic influence in Judah just as there had been in northern Israel before 722 B.C. No doubt this was Judah's accommodation not only to Assyrian political dominance but also to the great influx of Israelite refugees after 722 B.C.

Sanders argues that we ought not be too harsh on Manasseh since it was only his willingness to accommodate which saved Judah and God's covenant people from the Assyrian policy of fragmentation and assimilation. Manasseh did what he had to do. "Flexibility was needed and if Manasseh had not provided it and thus kept the Assyrians at bay, Josiah's reform and Deuteronomy, might not have occurred."¹⁵ Following 2 Samuel 7,

¹⁴James A. Sanders, Torah and Canon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 37.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 40.

Manasseh had advocated a royal or Davidic theology. "Its ethic of election was two-fold: we are elected, and God is faithful to that promise, come what may."¹⁶

Sanders, in "Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy" summarized in one paragraph the thrust of Deuteronomy as follows:

The student of the history of interpretation well knows how a single text, when stabilized in form and content, scores different points when read in different contexts. Deuteronomy in its original context of seventh century B.C.E. Judah was a challenge to a royalist theology based on unconditional promises (no matter how much Manasseh had needed the flexibility of domestic policy it offered in the face of Assyrian policy) and the blessed assurance of God's faithfulness. But a stabilized, inflexible text of Deuteronomy (Deut. 4:2; 12:32), read unchanged a few decades later in a totally different context, apparently scored a quite different point from that intended by its authors, or heard by Josiah; and the Deuteronomic admonition that disobedience would bring abrogation of the covenant was sometimes read to say if an individual suffers deprivation and hardship he must have sinned. Deuteronomy did not say that, but Job was surely written in part to record a resounding "No" to such inversions of the Deuteronomic ethic of election. No one need have changed the text of Deuteronomy for the inverted reading to occur. On the contrary, if one did not alter the reading of Deuteronomy dynamically, to adjust its "text" to the new "context," then the inversion was almost bound to occur.¹⁷

Sanders argues that Luke's purpose in structuring his Central Section (9:51-18:14) on Deuteronomy is to challenge this individualistic, inverted reading of Deuteronomy in his own time. Read by individuals, the ethic of election in

¹⁶Sanders, Luke, 23.

¹⁷James A. Sanders, "Hermeneutics of True and False Prophecy" in Canon and Authority (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 27.

Deuteronomy was translated to mean if you are poor, suffering and downtrodden, you have been sinful and disobedient; if you are prosperous and blessed, you have been righteous and obedient. In Luke 13 Jesus challenged this belief in recalling the suffering of the Galileans. Their suffering was not punishment. The message was: unless you repent, you will perish! In that case, Jesus meant "change your hermeneutics," i.e. "how you read Scripture."

Sanders suggests that the parables of the Central Section continually reemphasize both the freedom of God and the responsibilities of election and make it clear that the elect cannot be identified or defined by the external conditions or circumstances of their lives.

The banquet parable in Luke 14 makes it clear that it is the poor, the blind, the lame, and the maimed who accept the householder's invitation and receive the blessing, while the elect make their excuses, using their old hermeneutic in applying Deuteronomy 20, refuse the invitation, and are lost forever.¹⁸

Tragically, the elect (~~οι εκλεκτοι~~^{οι εκλεκτοι}) did not see that the "eschaton" had come in Jesus and were therefore unready to celebrate the great messianic banquet at the end of this age.

Tape Number Five: The Grumbling of the Faithful

In this presentation Dr. Sanders illustrates from Luke 15-16 how he reads the Bible. Clearly he suggests that Luke

¹⁸Sanders, Luke, 23.

is living in the tension of the "freedom of the God of grace." If we can identify (dynamic analogy) with the abandoned sheep on the hillside and still rejoice when the shepherd finds the lost sheep, then we understand how great God's grace truly is. From the perspective of the elect, the grace of God often appears to be a form of divine injustice.

In the parable of the prodigal son/elder brother, we have an example of how Luke is able to resignify the old Mosaic tradition of obedience and punishment found in Deut. 21:18-31. The point: the grace of God is usually greater than the faithful (including the elder son) are willing to see or admit. God's freedom and grace must be held in balance.

Sanders asserts that the parable of the rich man and Lazarus makes it patently clear that poverty and poor health are not signs of God's disfavor. Election, or salvation, may bring suffering rather than reward, as it did for Israel and for Christ. Again, we are challenged to read the Scriptures correctly: read it so as to hear the challenge and receive the blessing; read it with the right hermeneutic.

Tape Number Six: Luke's Account of Holy Week

In Luke 19, Luke tells the story of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. At last, his journey upon "the way" had lead him to his destination. This account is keyed to Psalm 118, an old dramatic liturgy based on the ritual of the king's

annual humiliation and exaltation experience. Jesus and his disciples specifically enacted this ritual and the priests should have been waiting upon the steps of the Temple to respond, "blessed be he" - but their eyes were closed to who he was. So the disciples take the priests part. "God will have eyewitnesses; if 'the faithful' do not respond, the very stones of the Temple steps will cry out."¹⁹

Sanders believes that the Gospel comes to its climax in Chapter 22 with the story of the night of Jesus' betrayal and the sharing of the Passover meal with his disciples. Luke asks us to "remember" in the same sense as in Israel's ancient cultic concept of "anamnesis." "The Lord's Supper is to be understood as a 'retelling' or 'actualization' of that memorial event which makes present again Christ, the twelve disciples, and all the eyewitnesses from Genesis on down to the present."²⁰ In this story we are challenged to identify with Judas and the other disciples. In doing so, we can once again experience the forgiveness which Christ gave to Peter.

Tape Number Seven: The Birth of the Church
and the Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

Dr. Sanders tells us that Acts continues God's story in the Early Church. The apostles are no longer dull; they

¹⁹Ibid., 24.

²⁰Ibid.

have become wide-eyed "eyewitnesses and servants of the word." God is at work through their service.

In Acts we meet Saul of Tarsus who believed the followers of the Way used a wrong hermeneutic. They misread Scripture. On the road to Damascus he was converted, i.e. his identity was changed as was his hermeneutic. Saul the Pharisaic Zealot became Paul the Apostle and changed his way of reading Scripture. Instead of continuing to ask "What does Scripture say we should do?" he began to read God's story by asking "What is God doing?" In effect, Paul had a new mindset as described in the "Song of Christ" in Philippians 2:5-11. This new mindset he urged upon all his fellow believers. Literally, Saul's eyes were opened and he could truly see. Acts ends with Paul in Rome puzzled by the spiritual blindness of those who do not know how to read their Scripture.

It is with the hermeneutical approach that Dr. Sanders has outlined in the video-tape series on Luke-Acts, and in his other publications, that this writer has approached his sermon series on Luke's Central Section.

CHAPTER III

THE CENTRAL SECTION AS INTERPRETED AND
PREACHED BY ARTHUR J. TANKERSLEYIntroduction

The following ten sermon texts from Luke were chosen as being representative of the central section of the Gospel. The sermons assume that Luke was a Christian deuteronomist, in that the book of Deuteronomy seems to be woven into the heart of each pericope of the section. In order to read these texts the way Luke meant them to be read by the church, I have followed a series of hermeneutical questions which I have asked of each text. These questions have been suggested by James A. Sanders (Chapter II). I have not attempted to write a commentary on each of these texts. However, the study of several major commentaries undergird the answers given to each question. The questions functioned as work sheets and preliminary preparation for the final writing of the sermon. What I have discovered is that the questions have enabled me to bring the text into dialogue with my context in a meaningful way. Therefore, each sermon will be preceded by these questions and by a reflection on our church's context as the sermon was prepared. The questions are as follows:

(1) What is God doing in this situation? To ask this question is to theologize.

(2) With whom do we identify in this text? In identifying with particular persons or groups we use the principle of dynamic analogy. We identify ourselves with our dynamic equivalents. We risk identifying not just with the good guys but also with the bad guys.

(3) How was Luke re-presenting Deuteronomy and thereby adapting the older tradition to his situation?

(4) Was Luke Using the hermeneutic of prophetic critique or a constitutive hermeneutic?

(5) How do we read this text honestly? What does it say about God's grace working in and through human sinfulness? After we have seen God's activity, then we can ask, "What ought we to do in response?" This is to moralize at the right point.

(6) What does it mean to read the text with humility? It means to identify in the stories, reports, and parables with those with whom we might not otherwise identify.

(7) Where is the humor in this text? What does it mean to take God a little more seriously than usual and ourselves a little less so?

(8) What does this text contribute to our church's self-understanding and mission in the world?

Sermon: "What Will We Do With Jesus?"

Luke 9:51-56

Deuteronomy 1:6, 19-25; 2:1-9

September 14, 1980

Hermeneutical Questions

What is God doing in this situation? Clearly, in Jesus of Nazareth God's will was happening. It was necessary for Jesus to fulfill his destiny in Jerusalem. The things that would happen in Jerusalem, i.e. his death, resurrection, and ascension, represented the culmination of that moment for which he was born. His "going," his "journey" had an end in Jerusalem, but in another sense, it was a beginning as God continued to be "on the way" with his church. As God journeyed with the Children of Israel, under the leadership of Moses, through the Sinai toward the Promised Land, so this "prophet like Moses" was leading a new band of "children" "on the way" toward a cross. This journey was the result of God's activity in calling out a faithful people, who in seeing God at work in the ἀναλήψεις of this "prophet like Moses" were willing to join him in the journey as "eyewitnesses and servants of the word."

In "setting his face" toward Jerusalem, Jesus was fully accepting God's will for his life. God's will for him was his Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension in the Holy City. Jesus understood that in travelling to Jerusalem and entering the city, he was the prophesied messianic servant-king. In him,

God visited the city and the tragedy was that the city did not know the day of its visitation.

With whom do we identify in this text? I believe that we may identify with both the Samaritans and the two disciples, James and John. The Samaritans refuse hospitality. They will not receive Jesus precisely because "his face is set toward Jerusalem." Not only do we have ancient hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans reflected in this text. We also have a foreshadowing of the churches mission to the Gentiles. Jesus is not welcome because of his commitment to his ^{ἀντίπρως} in Jerusalem. In other words, God's purpose to save the world through the Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus was a scandal to the Samaritans even as it was to the Jews. In identifying with the Samaritans we are reminded how difficult it is for us to welcome One into our lives who is headed to a cross. His destiny calls into question the destinies of self-seeking and success which we have chosen. We do not want to be identified with One who cannot make it in the eyes of the world. "His way" is the way of the loser and we want only to be identified with winners. Therefore, we refuse hospitality. We are negative eyewitnesses to what God is doing by coming to us in Jesus.

James and John, his two disciples, also revealed that they did not understand Jesus' destiny. We must identify with them as well. As they traveled "on the way" with Jesus, their

minds were on greatness and power. (9:46-50) They were not prepared for his "ἀνάνηψας" anymore than the Samaritans. They were "into" the ways of the world. If the Samaritans are not on God's side, "our side," then like Elijah of old, we will blast them off the earth with fire from heaven. I suspect the disciples manifest a common attitude that those of the "in group," "the church" often have toward the unreceptive pagans of the world. If we could, we would terminate their existence, or at least strip them of their civil rights. Actually, we never expect much from the "secular humanists," "socialist," "communist," pagans, i.e. the Samaritans. Would not the world be a better place if it were populated with people like us who are on "the way with Jesus." At times, we think, a good blast of fire from heaven might solve our evangelism problem.

How was Luke re=presenting Deuteronomy and thereby adapting the older tradition to this situation? The key word "ἀνάνηψας" would have triggered the memory of the "Assumption of Moses," of his leadership of Israel, his series of addresses across the Jordan, and of his mysterious death in Moab. This first century document was a midrash on the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. Luke decided to use this Old Testament book, chapters 1-26, as a backdrop for his Central Section. Using this midrashic methodology, he wrote a Christian Deuteronomy presenting Jesus as the "prophet like Moses", Deuteronomy 18:15.

He did this in order to challenge the doctrine of election then current in the religious establishment.

"He set his face to go to Jerusalem" is an expression of the LXX. C. F. Evans concludes that Luke 9:51-53 and 10:1

Suggest a situation analagous to that of Moses who, in leading Israel towards the Promised Land, sends out one emissary from each tribe "to search the land for us, and bring us word again of the way by which we must go up, and the cities unto which we shall come," and who appoints seventy elders to receive of his spirit and to share his work."¹

Craig A. Evans in an unpublished School of Theology graduate seminar paper,² has suggested that the phrase "αὐτός τὸ πρόσωπον ἐστῆρξεν τοῦ πορεύεσθαι εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ," has a semitic, Old Testament background that is rooted in several Canaanite texts. He sees a paradigm which is as follows:

- (1) The messenger is sent either by a king or a god.
- (2) The messenger then "sets his face toward" someone or someplace.
- (3) The messenger then travels to his destination, which may be either explicit or implicit.
- (4) The messenger delivers his message.

Craig Evans sees this paradigm in the Old Testament in several places, namely Genesis 31:13, 21; Numbers 22:4-25; 24:1, 2, 3-9; Ezekiel 6:2; 13:17; 20:46; 21:2; 25:2; 28:21; 29:2; 38:2. From Ezekiel the paradigm is as follows:

¹C. F. Evans, "The Central Section of St. Luke's Gospel," in Studies in the Gospels (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), 38.

²Craig A. Evans, "He Set His Face to Go to Jerusalem, Luke 9:51-56" (Unpublished Seminar Paper, School of Theology, Claremont, Spring 1980).

- (1) Ezekiel has been commissioned by God as his spokesman;
- (2) Ezekiel "sets his face" toward the mountains, the Amorites, etc.;
- (3) Ezekiel travels to his respective destinations;
- (4) Ezekiel delivers his messages.

Craig Evans suggests that it is quite likely that the idea of travel is always implicit in Ezekiel simply because that is the basic connotation of the idiom "to set one's face" itself.

Later, the idiom loses this technical aspect of "going." Thus, by the time of Luke, *πορεύεσθαι* (which replaces "toward") must be added to avoid ambiguity and as David Gill has argued, serves as a terminus technicus in the Central Section itself. Craig Evans cites Gustaf Dalman.³ Dalman argues that the idiom spoken of above, Luke 9:53, is an incorrectly used Hebraism which cannot be imitated in Hebrew. Luke 9:53 refers back to v. 51. The *τὸ πρόσωπον ἐστὶν ὁδὸς τοῦ πορεύεσθαι* there ought to be repeated. The expression in v. 53 is an unskilled abbreviation of the full phrase. Craig A. Evans suggests the mishandling of the phrase could be due to the lack of any parallels in his sources.

Craig A. Evans argues that we have in Luke's Central Section all four elements of the paradigm:

- (1) Jesus is sent by (and represents) God. Luke 3; 4; 9:28-36.
- (2) The idiom appears in 9:51, Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem."

³Gustaf Dalman, Worte Jesu (ET: The words of Jesus; Edinburgh: Clark, 1902), 25, cited in *ibid*.

- (3) Jesus travels to Jerusalem (which constitutes the Central Section itself).
- (4) Jesus delivers his message in Jerusalem (and along the way as well).

C. A. Evans then asks: "Could it be that what we have to do with here in Luke 9:51-56 is an intentional reflection of a prophet motif (with an emphasis upon the aspect of divine commission) centered around the idiom, 'He set his face?'" His purpose in employing this Old Testament idiom was to underscore the immensely important (and official) nature of Jesus' mission as God's emissary. His is a message of salvation.

James Sanders tells us why such prophets as Jesus were never acceptable in their home country. He writes,

No prophet, that is, no true prophet of the Elijah, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah type is dektos by his own countrymen precisely because his message always must bear in it a divine challenge to Israel's covenantal self-understanding in any generation. In other words, a true prophet of the prophet-martyr tradition cannot be dektos at home precisely because of his hermeneutics.⁴

Sanders would conclude, suggests Craig A. Evans, that Jesus must "set his face" in a way that the prophets Isaiah, Amos, and Ezekiel had to, for theirs was a message which made them unwelcome in their own countryland.

It seems to this writer that Luke has tied together the prophet motif of Deuteronomy and Ezekiel to show that this

⁴James A. Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4" in Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 99.

"prophet like Moses" is indeed unacceptable, not only in Samaria, but also in Jerusalem. Luke is signalling us with these Old Testament references that Jesus must suffer, die, and be raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

Was Luke using the hermeneutic of prophetic critique or a constitutive hermeneutic? Clearly, as in all that has been said above, Luke reveals that Jesus had "set his face to go to Jerusalem." He knew that a true prophet would always be unwelcome and therefore a candidate for death. Why? Because his prophetic hermeneutic would emphasize the freedom of God and thus call into question the election of Israel.

But not only is this prophets message for Israel. It is for the Samaritans also. If they reject this "prophet like Moses" they will be rejecting God's visitation. His message calls them to repentance and faith just as with Israel. The Samaritan church's doctrine of election is called into question even as Israel's and even as ours. In having a visit from this prophet who is on his way to Jerusalem our whole self-understanding and direction in life is called into question. If we do not repent and join him "upon the way" as "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" then our future is indeed desperate. As Tiede says,

Without the gift of repentance, neither the Jews nor the Samaritans would be part of restored Israel from which the mission to the Gentiles proceeds. The prophetic

critique transcends ethnic lines.⁵

The refusal of the prophet like Moses constitutes and reveals the grievous apostasy of both the Jews and the Samaritans.⁶

How do we read this text honestly? God's grace is personified in Jesus. His grace is not the exclusive possession of Israel. God loves Samaritans as well as Jews. In Jesus, these ancient enemies can be reconciled. Even with their rejection of Jesus, Jesus will not have them consumed by fire from heaven. His disciples do not see how great God's grace is. They were misreading 2 Kings 1:9-15. Again, Jesus leaves us in the tension of the freedom of the God of grace. In Acts we read that the Samaritans do respond to the gospel. God is at work in the midst of human sinfulness.

What does it mean to read the text with humility? Rather than identifying with Jesus and criticizing the Samaritans or the disciples, we humbly find our identity with those who misunderstand and reject. In doing so we hear the power of this text's message.

Where is the humor in this text? I find humor in the disciples desire to call fire down from heaven upon the Samaritans. It is tragically humorous. Like King David's judgment

⁵David L. Tiede, Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 62.

⁶Ibid., 63.

upon himself when confronted by Nathan, the disciples deserve the punishment they have prescribed. In their zeal, I see myself and must laugh at my blinded judgment that often sees the speck in my brother's eye and fails to see the beam in my own. This insight causes me to take God more seriously. Surely, only his grace can save me in my folly.

What does this text contribute to our church's self-understanding and mission in the world? It reminds us that God loves those outside the church as well as those inside the church. It anchors our self-identify in the actions of God in history. It calls us to a pilgrimage "upon the way" with Jesus Christ. It reminds us that death and resurrection are our destiny. It assures us that our mission, our "eyewitness" to "the things that have happened" in Jerusalem will not always be met with success. It calls us to a witness that is characterized by patience, understanding, and love. It rebukes us for our judgmentalism but also reminds us that when we fail, there are other villages where we are to serve nevertheless.

Church Context

The following sermon was preached on September 14, 1980. I had been preaching on Luke 1-9 from the previous advent season and was now prepared to continue the series on Luke into the Fall 1980. September in our church is like a new beginning: People return from the beach and vacations, begin to settle in,

prepare for school to begin, and some have a new start at church. September 14 marked the beginning of our church school after a summer vacation. The whole machinery of the church begins to run again. Our stewardship program for the 1981 budget was ready to be activated.

Our church serves an upper middle class community. It is predominately older with a growing younger congregation. The republicans outnumber the democrats 6 to 1. In general, we would be considered a beautiful, successful, wealthy, conservative, community that seeks to shut the world out on the other side of the greenbelt. Laguna Beach represents an escape from the congestion, development, air pollution, ethnic diversity, and crime of the greater Los Angeles area. However, we have a drug problem, traffic congestion in the summer and on weekends, limited parking, and tension between the "no growth" advocates and the business community. We are a vacation community and an art colony. It is estimated that 25% to 30% of our population is gay or lesbian. The life style of Laguna is free and casual. Almost anything goes as long as you do not block your neighbor's view or violate his property which is extremely valuable. Many make a living from real estate and many have become wealthy from buying, improving, and selling houses. Over the past ten years Laguna Beach has changed from a retirement community to a bedroom community for the growing industrial and business community of Southern Orange County.

We estimate that 80% of our parish area is non-churched. In 1979 we did a mission study and established our goals and objectives for the next five year period.

In a very real sense, we are a church which is struggling for an identity. The Christians are in the minority, although our 700 members would be somewhat representative of those who live in the city. We are faced with nurturing our people, giving them a biblical vision for ministry, and cultivating a desire to reach out and serve. Our people need both to be challenged and comforted. Luke has much to say to those of us seeking to be "on the way" with Christ in Laguna Beach.

Sermon: "What Will We Do With Jesus?"

Our text finds Jesus and his disciples on the road leading from Galilee to Jerusalem. It is not be accident that Jesus has chosen "this way." That moment for which he had been born had come to fulfillment. God's will for his life was now ready to be realized and Jesus had accepted his destiny in Jerusalem. There he would be "received up."

Luke's genius is evident by how much meaning he packs into so few words. One poignant word captures our attention in the original Greek text of Luke 9:51, "²ἀναμνησews." For those who lived in first century Palestine and who knew Jewish literature, they would immediately have thought of the "²ἀναμνησews" of Moses, one of the great heroes of Israel's history. In recalling the mysterious "receiving up" of Moses, according

to the will of God, they would have been lead to ask whether or not this Jesus, on his way to Jerusalem might not be the "prophet like Moses" spoken of in Deuteronomy 18:15. Biblical scholarship now suggests that this is what Luke intended to signal to those who read his text.

But the words of our text become even more heavy laden with biblical meaning. Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." This phrase is a biblical idiom of the Old Testament, which would have called to mind, among those who knew their Bible, all those prophet-martyrs, like Ezekiel, who had been sent by God as God's representatives; who had "set their face to go," who had travelled to their destiny; and who had delivered their prophetic messages which called into question their peoples self-understanding as God's chosen people.

In speaking of Jesus' impending "ἀνάμνησις," his death, resurrection, and ascension in Jerusalem, the promise of Deuteronomy 18:15 of the "prophet like Moses" and the admonition "him you shall heed" would have captured Luke's reader's attention. In saying that Jesus had "set his face to go to Jerusalem," the prophet like Ezekiel, who was called to deliver God's message of judgment and salvation to his people would also have surely been noted by those who thought of themselves as God's true people. What Luke is suggesting, in biblical words and phrases, is that this Jesus, now on his way to Jerusalem, is God's representative, the prophet whose presence is to be welcomed, received, and celebrated. His message is to

be heard and believed. His call to discipleship is to be enthusiastically accepted. Those who can see that this Jesus is the fulfillment of their Scriptures, repent of their sins, and join him "upon the way." In following him there is new life and hope as "eyewitnesses and servants of his word."

This morning I ask you to identify with the Samaritans. Jesus came to their village and they would not receive him. Like Moses and the children of Israel in Numbers 20, seeking the right of passage through Edom as they travelled toward the Promised Land, Jesus and his disciples are refused hospitality as well, by these near relatives and ancient enemies of the Jews, the Samaritans. It is not easy for us to see ourselves in the shoes of the Samaritans in this case. Far easier to identify with Jesus, but if we do, we will fail to hear the power of our text and it will not be a Word of God for us today.

Naturally, we ask "why?" "Why did they not receive him?" Luke tells us they refused him hospitality, not just because he was a Jew, but because "his face was set toward Jerusalem." The geography is not the issue in this text. The question is one of theology. They reject him because of his destiny, not because of the city. Jerusalem stands for his death upon the cross; for his resurrection on the third day; for his ascension. They reject him as "the prophet like Moses" for the same reason that we do. We do not desire a prophet with such a destiny. It is difficult to believe that God will come to us as one

who must suffer, die, and be raised again. In I Corinthians 1, Paul said, "the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

In speaking of American in 1978, Christopher Lasch in *The Culture of Narcissism* has well described us and our desires, we contemporary Samaritans.

As the twentieth century approaches its end, the conviction grows that many other things are ending too. The question of whether the world will end in fire or in ice, with a bang or a whimper, no longer interests artists alone.

Impending disaster has become an everyday concern, so commonplace and familiar that nobody any longer gives much thought to how disaster might be averted. People busy themselves instead with survival strategies, measures designed to prolong their own lives, or programs guaranteed to ensure good health and peace of mind.

Americans have retreated to purely personal preoccupations. Having no hope of improving their lives in any of the ways that matter, people have convinced themselves that what matters is psychic self-improvement; getting in touch with their feelings, eating health food, taking lessons in ballet or bellydancing, immersing themselves in the wisdom of the East, jogging, learning how to relate, overcoming the "fear of pleasure."

To live for the moment is the prevailing passion—to live for yourself, not for your predecessors or posterity.⁷

In such an America in 1980, we Samaritans are not interested in a Savior who calls in to question our self-centered, private

⁷Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism, American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1978), 3-5.

values. We seek a therapist who can guide us on our inner journey toward peace of mind. We long for freedom and not responsibility. We search for pleasure and not pain. The road that we run is that of the 10K or 26 mile marathon. To complete that race, to break that barrier represents self-realization and health. We are on a path leading to an inner personal wisdom that has no place for "a way" that leads to a cross of suffering and victory over death.

Jesus, the "prophet like Moses" comes to us this morning and the question is, "what will we do with him?" If we welcome him, we welcome and affirm his destiny, and that has radical implications for how we live our lives. To receive him is to accept his destiny as our own. To welcome him to join him in his journey. To follow him is to know that the Son of Man has no permanent place to rest. To walk with him means to become identified with a new mission that comes before family loyalties. To go with him is to keep one's eyes upon the goal, never looking back. Little wonder that we do not receive this prophet. He turns our lives upside down and troubles our easy consciences. Like the Samaritans, we tell him, "please leave our city," Religion is one thing. The debate about whose mountain is more important and central is one thing. The cultivation of private values is one thing. But this presence and message which demands such radical repentance, change, and redirection toward service is another. We will have God on our own terms, perhaps as an inner spiritual

guide, but not on the terms of one whose "face is set" toward a crucifixion.

But some of us are travelling with Jesus "upon the way" and we must identify with James and John. If we are honest, we know we are offended and ticked off by these Samaritans who have rejected us and refused hospitality to us. How dare these half-breed sinners close their doors to us! Our movement is the wave of the future. Like a group of expectant politicians running a campaign, we note this rejection of our candidate. When we are in power, all those who did not help along the way will be forced to pay a price. We have an enemies list. As we walk in their shoes, we sense their motives and true goals. They are jockeying for position and so are we. Not long before, we had argued which of us was the greatest and would have the most clout when we arrived in Jerusalem. To prove the power of this "benefactor" and indeed our own power, we suggest, that in true Old Testament Elijah style politics, that Jesus ought to allow us to blast these infidels off the face of the earth with fire from heaven.

Lest we feel superior to James and John, let us remember what it is like to be rejected and told to get out. As a nation, we have recently had such an experience in Vietnam and in Iran. Indeed, in both places we were told "Yankee Go Home." We've had great difficulty in understanding these rejections. We had originally come to those places for their good. Our vision was to stabilize the world, build democratic

institutions, guarantee freedom and justice, and maintain a balance of power between East and West. In Vietnam, when our good intentions were rejected, we grew angry. If Vietnam was unwilling to receive our gracious gift of American salvation, then they would experience the full force of our power. So we rained "fire from heaven" upon the whole country. We defoliated the jungles with Agent Orange. We mined their harbors and bombed their cities in order to bring them to their senses and save them. And now with the recent affront in Iran, many have suggested that we ought to "Nuke the Ayatollah," "Nuke 'em till they glow." If necessary, lob an "A" bomb into the men's room in the Kremlin. Yes, "fire from heaven" will give those who have rejected us what they deserve. How human were James and John. How much like us. Luke tells us simply, "Jesus turns and rebukes us."

Often we disciples "upon the way" do not understand God's will any better than those who outright reject him. Our thoughts are not his thoughts. Our ways are not his ways. "Our way" is the way of power, success, self realization, inner peace, victory. We are those who know how the world functions. One thing anyone understands is power, especially supernatural power. With fire from heaven we can rule the world and God needs practical people who know how to keep people in line. Thank God, Jesus rebukes us. God's way leads to a humble, suffering death for the salvation of the

world and we are left with both Samaritans and disciples in this text asking "What will we do with this Jesus?"

Reject him?

Ask him to leave our village?

Refuse him hospitality?

Use his power for our selfish ends?

Or follow him "upon the way" as rebuked disciples whose ego's have taken a beating, and who are only just beginning to learn what it means "to go" with him toward his destiny in Jerusalem.

Sermon: "We Are Sent"
Luke 10:1-20
Deuteronomy 1:19-38, 2:26-3:22
September 20, 1980

Hermeneutical Questions

What is God doing in this situation? Not only had God's rule come into the world in and through Jesus, but also, it was manifest in the words and deeds of his "sent ones." The Kingdom of God was present in its eschatological power. To hear the message of the Kingdom through the disciples was to hear Jesus. To reject the messengers of peace was also to reject the Prince of Peace. The mission of the disciples and its success was proof that God was acting. The mission in Luke 10 was a prefiguring of the continuing work of God through the church's witness in the Book of Acts. The authority and the power which the disciples enjoyed over their enemies was the authority and power of God, not theirs.

With whom do we identify in this text? In this sermon, I have identified the church with the ones who were appointed and sent by the Lord on their mission. The mission entrusted to the seventy is the same mission given to us modern disciples who must go forth into a threatening world as vulnerable humans amongst those who are enemies of the Prince of Peace and his Kingdom.

It is even more difficult to identify with those who refuse hospitality to the messengers of the Kingdom. What

must it have been like to be a satisfied citizen of Chorazin, Tyre, Sidon, or Capernaum? We must hear the warning in this text. Are we receptive to the nearness of the Kingdom of God or are we its enemies? Even Satan and his demons are subject to the Kingdom. Their authority and power are broken. In this sense they yield allegiance to the King. What about those who are so spiritually blind that they reject his rule? Their destiny is judgment on the final day.

How was Luke re-presenting Deuteronomy and thereby adapting the older tradition to his situation? On the first approach to the Promised Land Moses sent twelve spies to "bring back a report of the way by which we shall go up, and of the cities into which we shall enter." Deuteronomy 1:21-22. In the second approach Moses sent messengers to Sihon, the next place he was about to go. Deuteronomy 2.

Moses, Joshua and Caleb were ready to lead the people into God's harvest, the Promised Land, but the land was filled with threatening enemies. The people refused to trust God's authority and power over the enemy.

In Deuteronomy 2:26-33, as Israel was on its way into the Promised Land, they sent messengers to Sihon with "words of peace" seeking food and drink for a price. When he did not respond peacefully, Israel did battle with him and the enemy was defeated. His land was then possessed by Israel and the fear of Israel began to spread.

As a Christian Deuteronomy, Luke presented Jesus as the "prophet like Moses" who was leading his disciples on God's chosen way toward the realization of the Kingdom. On the way, this "prophet like Moses" sent his messengers before him to the towns and villages he himself was about to visit. Hospitality shown to the messengers of peace was hospitality to the Kingdom of God. Receptivity to the messengers meant receptivity to the authority and power of God. Rejection of the messengers placed those who refused hospitality under the promise of eschatological judgment. This text seems to foreshadow Luke 19:41-44 in which Jerusalem rejected the Prince of Peace because it did not know the time of its visitation. Indeed, throughout Luke, there is the tension between those who are positive and those who are negative witnesses to what God was doing.

Clearly, Luke, in this text, was re-signifying the Deuteronomy story, not in all the details or words, but in the sense that the message was the same. God's Kingdom was on the move and blessed were those who moved in its joy and who welcomed its representatives. Woe to those who resisted its coming and rejected its messengers of peace. Their fate was sealed.

Was Luke using the hermeneutic of prophetic critique or a constitutive hermeneutic? In this pericope, God in His/Her freedom offered the Kingdom to any who would receive and

welcome it. Any person, household, or town that did not receive the messengers of peace had rejected God. Therefore, any claim to election which at the same time refused hospitality to Jesus or his representatives, was a false claim. Jesus was calling into question any doctrine of election which was held by those who could not see that in him and his disciples God's ancient story was continuing. This is the hermeneutic of prophetic critique.

However, the constitutive hermeneutic was also present. God's grace was extended. God's compassion for the harvest waiting to be harvested was revealed. The love of God for a spiritually blinded world undergirded the mission given to the seventy. The tension between the prophetic and constitutive hermeneutic was maintained.

How do we read this text honestly? God works in and through human weakness and sinfulness. The fact that Jesus chose seventy humans to be messengers of his Kingdom was an affirmation of this truth. The seventy did not understand what they were doing or whose power they were exercising. They returned from their successes with a triumphantist attitude. Jesus had to remind them of whose they were and whose authority and power they had seen at work. If God could use these seventy, then he might also use people like us who only partially understand what he is doing in our time.

Where is the humor in this text? The seventy returned from their mission rejoicing in their successes. The demons were subject to them. In possessing the name of Jesus they had real power. Jesus must have laughed at them and so must we. We are so like them. We rejoice at the wrong things and for the wrong reasons. Our true joy should be that we belong to the King, that our names are written in heaven.

What does this text contribute to our church's self-understanding and mission in the world? We are those, like the seventy, who have been sent on a mission. By word and deed God's Kingdom is breaking into our time and place through us. Jesus imparts to us his view of a needy world and commissions us to go as servants of the Kingdom. We go as representatives of Jesus and of the One who sent him.

Church Context

During the early fall of each year it seems that the summer life-style dies slowly in Laguna Beach. Our people need to be reminded that they, as Christians, have something important to do. Jesus calls us to be his people and to be instruments of his peace. It has often been frustrating to observe the "layed back" attitude of so many who are not sure they have the interest or desire to live for anything beyond their own pleasures. The fall of 1980 was such a time. The following sermon was my effort to wake up our sleeping giant to its

mission and challenge.

Since we include children in worship the "Kaleidoscope" reference was an effort to capture their attention and hold it. The sermon reflects my frustration with a band of lazy disciples who need to hear Christ's call to mission and respond enthusiastically. Their view of God had become too "laid back."

The Sermon: "We Are Sent"

Each year at this time as we are beginning our fall program I find myself struggling with a basic question about our church. "Who are we and what are we supposed to be doing?" Summer has a way of extending itself far into the fall and it seems that the spirit of summer fun and relaxation will never be over. Summer vacation is wonderful, but there comes a time when the holiday perspective can so dominate us and mesmerize us that we become like a sleeping giant while the rest of the world goes about its business. Out of frustration and eagerness I begin to get agitated and ready for action as we move into late September. So I ask, "Who are we and what are we supposed to be doing as the Church of Jesus Christ?"

The answer to this question is found in Luke 10. As those who are following Jesus Christ on his way to Jerusalem we have revealed to us that we are those who are given a mission. "We are sent." The subject of our text is the

"Sentness of the Church." Luke develops the subject something like a kaleidoscope. When I was a child one of my favorite toys was the kaleidoscope. It was like a small telescope into which one could look and see beautiful color patterns. As you turned it before your eyes the color patterns would change. It was fascinating to see the many different patterns as they changed before my eyes. Luke 10 is like a kaleidoscope. As I turn the text before your mind's eye, allow yourself to see the various truths concerning the mission to which we are called.

First, Jesus enables us to see that we, as his disciples, are sent. Jesus Christ calls us to follow him. Like many who have heard his call, we have responded and we are on our way with him toward Jerusalem. We have seen his authority and power manifested in his words and deeds. But the work is great. As we move with him we become aware that he is training us to share not only his fellowship, but also to share with him his mission. Along the way, we find ourselves singled out, along with a large group of disciples to go before him into every town and village where he himself is about to come. As we reflect on the fact that "we are sent" we are reminded that God's servants have always been sent. Abraham and Sarah were sent into a new life in a new land bearing the promise of God's blessing. Moses was sent by the Lord to be an instrument of deliverance for the slaves of Egypt. Isaiah was sent

to proclaim his prophetic word to the nation. Jeremiah was sent in the midst of tears to speak a word which was burning within his heart. Jonah was sent to Ninevah to call for repentance. Jesus was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Paul was sent as an apostle to the gentiles. Yes, from Abraham, to Paul, to Augustine, to Calvin, to Knox, to us, the church has been called in every generation to follow its Lord and to be the instrument of the Lord as his Kingdom has advanced in the world. Today we join those early seventy disciples who have just learned that they are following in order to be sent.

Secondly, as we turn the kaleidoscope Jesus enables us to see that "we are sent into the Lord's harvest." "The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few; pray therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Like ancient Israel, poised on the edge of the promised land, which was God's harvest ready to be harvested, so the church today stands before a harvest providentially prepared, ready to be harvested. As a boy I grew up in West Texas. Each winter the farmers planted their wheat. As spring came, the fields were green with the new wheat. By summer time the wheat was nearly two feet high and had turned a beautiful golden color. When that happened, it was ready for harvest. What was needed then were men and machines to harvest the wheat. Each spring and summer there were laborers who would follow

the harvest from the south to the Canadian north harvesting the wheat at just the right time. If the laborers were not there and ready, the crop would be lost.

Jesus saw that there was a harvest ready to be taken. Like Joshua, Caleb, and others who were sent to spy out the land, Jesus could see that the promise of a great harvest awaited. With compassion he looked upon a land in which people were like sheep without a shepherd, in which people were like a ripe crop ready to be taken into the Kingdom of God. The land, the towns, the villages, were waiting for laborers to come and begin their reaping for the Kingdom. The harvest belonged to the Lord; it was "white unto harvest" but the laborers were few.

As we see our community we must see as Jesus sees it. It is like a field ready to be harvested. Here are people's lives ready to be brought into the owner's storage barns. Here are people ready and longing to receive the Kingdom and enter into the joy it brings, but where are the laborers? "We are sent into the Lord's harvest" as his laborers.

Let us turn the kaleidoscope again. Through Jesus' eyes we see that "we are sent into the Lord's harvest with the Lord's vulnerability." "Go your way; behold I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves." Those who spied out the promised land reported back, "the people are greater and taller than we; the cities are great and fortified up to heaven."

Beside these giants, the children of Israel appeared as grasshoppers. They were filled with fear and dread. They had forgotten that the Lord had delivered them from Pharaoh of Egypt and gone before them in the Sinai. For God nothing was impossible, yet the children of Israel were kept from the harvest of the promised land because of their lack of faith stirred within them by their awareness of their own powerlessness and vulnerability.

The Lord sent his seventy into the harvest knowing their vulnerability. There were wolves and enemies in the land ready to consume meek lambs, yet the Lord sent them anyway.

Each year at this time I am reminded that not everyone in our community will welcome our mission here. The citizens of the land tend to be content with their lives. Many do not want to be disturbed. Many hold values and belief systems different from ours. Some are outright hostile to the church. Nevertheless our Lord sends us to work in his harvest with his vulnerability. What we learn is that his strength is made perfect in weakness and his grace is more than sufficient.

As I turn the kaleidoscope, a new color of truth takes shape. "We are sent into the Lord's harvest with a message." "Whatever house or city you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' The Kingdom of God has come near to you." Even as the messengers were sent to Sihon with words of peace, so the disciples of Christ were to enter every town

and village with the message of peace. The people of God are a people of peace. Their mission is to bring "shalom," which is God's healing, God's love, God's salvation, God's wholeness into every town and village to which they are sent.

It is in this spirit that the General Assembly has called us presbyterians to become peacemakers. Last May in Detroit, the General Assembly challenged the church to see its mission as that of making peace rather than that of saber rattling. In a time when we, as a nation, study how to make war; when we spend untold billions on the instruments of war; when we seek to guarantee our own security by having ever more effective ways of killing our international neighbors; who is it in our time who will say "Peace." Surely the villages and towns which we serve need God's peace enacted in word and deed. Surely the Prince of Peace who has sent us means us to live and proclaim his good news of peace. Whenever and wherever God's Kingdom comes near, the power of peace is manifest. We are sent into the Lord's harvest with a message of peace.

Turn the kaleidoscope again and you see that "we are sent into the harvest with our Lord's authority and power." "Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you." Obviously, these are metaphors which our Lord used to communicate to us that there are spiritual enemies in our world which lay claim to the land even as Sihon who rejected

Israel's words of peace.

This past summer I've been reading Richard John Neuhaus' book Freedom For Ministry. In it he reminds us messengers that the church bears witness to a "disputed sovereignty."⁸ Not all accept the truth that God's Kingdom is present. Not all have eyes to see and ears to hear. Not all believe in the present time anymore than they did when Jesus visited Jerusalem and the city did not know the time of its visitation by God. God's Kingdom, his sovereignty, is disputed, nevertheless, we go about our mission knowing that from the moment of Jesus' victory over temptation in the wilderness, the fate of the enemies of God was sealed. Sure judgment waits all those who refuse to repent and believe the gospel.

Turn the kaleidoscope one last time and what do we see? "We have been sent into the Lord's harvest and the result is joy for those who labor." It is indeed a joyful experience to have risked yourself for the Kingdom. Whatever resistance you may have met along the way is as nothing when you can look back and see how the Lord used you to bring his salvation into people's lives. No wonder the disciples came back from their mission rejoicing. Our Lord had but one corrective word for them. "Remember," he said, "to whom you belong and whose authority you exercise." "Rejoice that your names are written

⁸Richard John Neuhaus, Freedom for Ministry (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 60.

in heaven, that your identity is sealed." We are sent; sent by the Lord; sent with our Lord's vulnerability; sent with the Lord's message of peace; sent with the Lord's authority and power; sent to experience the Lord's joy."

Of the twelve spies who were sent to spy out the land only two came back willing to go up and claim it for the Kingdom. Everyone who was over the age of twenty at the time of the exodus died in the wilderness. Only Joshua and Calab believed and inherited the promise. God used a new generation and trained them in the wilderness. They claimed the land and completed the harvest. We recall that of the hundreds of people who followed Jesus, by the day of Pentecost, only 120 were left waiting to become "eyewitnesses and servants of the word." What this means to me is that God is willing to wait for a people of faith and peace who are ready to claim the harvest. God will not force us. Our number may be as few as seventy, but if we are willing to be sent we shall see what we have never seen; we shall hear what we never have heard. Our lives will be filled with joy if we are willing and ready to be sent to do the mission.

In these last days of summer let us pray that the Lord of the harvest will send laborers into his harvest. Let us each ask, "To what mission is the Lord sending me?"

Sermon: "Go and Do Likewise"
Luke 10:25-37
Deuteronomy 5-7
September 28, 1980

Hermeneutical Questions

What is God doing in this situation? The parable of the Good Samaritan arose out of a question asked by a lawyer. "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responded by calling him back to his Scriptures. "What do they say?" "What is written in the law?" "How do you read?" The will of God for human life is revealed in the Scripture. If one is to be just, one must be just on God's terms and those terms are expressed in the Book of Deuteronomy and the Book of Leviticus. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." "Do this and live." To love is to fulfill the law. The Apostle Paul echoes these words in Romans 13 and Galatians 5.

The story which Jesus told expressed this truth. To show love to one's neighbor in his moment of need is to prove one's neighborliness and obedience to the will of God. The lawyer was compelled to agree with Jesus' teaching. One cannot justify oneself by definitions of who the neighbor is or by legal obedience to narrowly defined rules. One dare not write off certain persons as beyond the duty of love. Why? Because the God who gave the Covenant at Sinai is a

merciful God and those who show mercy are truly his people.

"He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Micah 6:8.

Jesus taught in this parable that God is merciful and kind. Even as he heard Israel's cry under the oppression of slavery in Egypt, when they were as nothing, so God is the God of the powerless, the broken, the victim, the suffering, and the foreigner. To be obedient to the law is to love as God loves, to show mercy as God does. There are no limits to God's love and there ought be none to our's. It is not too much to say that Jesus became the Good Samaritan who stooped to help us helpless ones left beside the road as dead. In his death, resurrection, and ascension we see how far God will go to save the whole world.

With whom do we identify in this text? Using the principle of dynamic analogy we must identify with the members of the religious establishment. There was the lawyer educated in the law who knew what the Scriptures taught about love of God and neighbor. As a representative of the religious ones, he also knew that mercy has its limits, or so the interpreters of the law taught. Compassion and mercy were qualities that one showed to one's fellow Jews. By identifying ourselves with the lawyer we are reminded of how often we limit the duty to love to those who are in our camp. When confronted by the parable,

we also know that our limits on our duty to love are too restrictive.

The lawyer sought to justify himself. If love of God and neighbor were his duty, then he had to justify himself because he knew he had not kept the commandments. A tight definition of "Who is my neighbor?" was necessary to him to live on with an easy conscience. In the parable, Jesus brought him face-to-face with his own sin. In that moment there was hope that he might see the truth that God alone can justify the sinner and never the sinner himself.

In the story which Jesus told we may also identify with the priest and the Levite. Why do they not stop and help the victim? Perhaps they feared being attacked by the robbers. Perhaps they wanted to remain ceremonially pure for their service in the temple. Perhaps also the poor Jew left as a victim beside the road could easily be written off as a sinner because of his misfortune. Surely, one who suffered so had broken God's law and was receiving what he deserved from God. Why interfere? In these men, we see all of our rationalizations for not responding to human need. It is painful to realize that our religious commitments may restrict our compassion and cause us to violate the very norms we say we serve. In this there is a high degree of irony and even of tragedy.

The one who showed mercy was a Samaritan. He proved to be the neighbor. As one who had no standing in Israel, he was the one who kept the law. He loved his neighbor. He

would inherit eternal life. Jesus used him as an example for the lawyer. On the basis of his compassionate action in caring for the victim, we are admonished, "Go and do likewise." It is important that we identify with the Samaritan's example. He is one from beyond our camp who shows us the true meaning of life. But if we only identify with him and not the members of the orthodox religious community, we miss the power of the story.

How was Luke re-presenting Deuteronomy and thereby adapting the older tradition to his situation? In Deuteronomy 5 and 6 the people gathered before Moses to hear God's ordinances and judgments. To live by God's law revealed at Mt. Sinai was necessary if Israel was to obtain and maintain the promised land (5:16, 33; 6:2, 24). "And thou shalt do that which is pleasing and good before the Lord thy God, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest go in and inherit the good land, which the Lord swore to give to your fathers." 6:18-19.

The heart of God's will was revealed in the decalogue in Deuteronomy 5. The summary of that revelation is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." To remember and to obey this command when united with Leviticus 19:18 would guarantee blessing and life in the promised land. To forget

or to disobey the law was to incur a curse and to come under the judgment of God. This was an important word to the nation at the time of Manasseh. In Jesus' day, the message of Deuteronomy had been individualized so that if one were poor, or an outcast, or a victim, it was assumed that that person had broken the law and was suffering just punishment.

Notice in Luke that the lawyer asks, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He was accustomed to moralizing rather than theologizing. In answering his own question he quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18. The LXX of Deuteronomy 6:5 reads, "and thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy mind (διανοίας), and with all thy soul (ψυχῆς), and all thy strength (δυνάμεως)!" The quote from Luke 10:27 reads, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart (καρδίας), and with all your soul (ψυχῇ), and with all your strength (ἰσχύϊ), and with all your mind (διανοία)." With Luke's divergence from Mark and from the LXX it has been suggested that he was following a non-Markan version of the citation. Whatever the differences between the synoptic citations and the LXX the central message is clear. One is to love God with the totality of mind and will. No clear distinctions can be made between the different aspects of the human personality listed. In this pericope Luke's Jesus specifically quotes Deuteronomy and in doing so, gives us another reason for claiming his central section is a Christian Deuteronomy.

Even the quote from Leviticus 19:18 finds support in Deuteronomy 5. Arthur Kent points out that the decalogue contains four uses of the word neighbor (πληγλον), all of which speak of right relationship with him. Deuteronomy 5:21-21. Deuteronomy is concerned about the righteous treatment of the neighbor. According to Kent, Deuteronomy does not attempt to define the term "neighbor."⁹

In Deuteronomy 7 there is a warning against any positive involvement with the "many nations" who inhabited the promised land and whom the Lord promised to drive out. Israel was not to touch them except to destroy them. These other nations had the potential of leading Israel astray from the Lord God. The idolatry of the nations was to be avoided. Israel was to be a holy people to the Lord God. The Lord had chosen them out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his possession. They were God's elect people. Their election was rooted in God's love for them and not in any quality they possessed. It was God's will that the idolatrous nations be slowly driven out of the promised land by his holy elect people, Israel. Clearly, these nations were not considered "neighbors" to be loved. They were enemies. Little wonder that the lawyer in Luke 10 wished Jesus to tell him, "Who is my neighbor?" In the story which Jesus told he

⁹ Arthur Kent, "The Christian Deuteronomy" (Unpublished School of Theology, Claremont research paper, 1979), 21.

pictured a Samaritan as the righteous person who obeyed God's law and thus was the inheriter of eternal life. Samaritans were considered to be half-breeds and religiously apostates. They were ancient, idolatrous enemies of God's kingdom. See 2 Kings 17:24-41; Ezra 4:3ff; Nehemiah 4:1ff. In a very real sense then, Jesus, in his story of the Samaritan was re-interpreting Deuteronomy and its historical perspective. Deuteronomy was a word of God for Manasseh's generation, but Jesus interpreted it to be a reminder that those who love God and their neighbor are the truly elect, whether they be Jew, Samaritan, or Gentile.

Was Luke using the hermeneutic of prophetic critique or a constitutive hermeneutic? In each of the pericopes studied one can see Luke's hermeneutic of the "freedom of the God of grace." The representatives of the religious community had their doctrine of election called into question. If they failed to love a person in need, then they had violated the very law they professed to serve and came under its judgment. The true Israelite was the one who loved God and his neighbor as himself. In this sense, Jew, Samaritan, or Gentile may qualify. Indeed, this was a prophet's critique of a doctrine of election that had divorced election from responsibility. Without knowing it, the samaritan had become an "eyewitness and servant of the word." The priest and the levite could not see that the victimized Judean presented them with an opportunity

to respond to God's kingdom.

But there is grace in this story. God is shown to be a compassionate, merciful God, who desires that his people be like him. The samaritan is praised for doing the will of God. A religious community that anchors its identity in the "God of grace" is set free to love the poor, the sick, the downtrodden, and the suffering. To this community is promised "eternal life."

How do we read this text honestly? By focusing on God in reading the story we read this text honestly. This is painful because our weaknesses are so clearly seen. But if we can see ourselves in these men, then there is hope that the vision may lead us to repent and become more like the samaritan. Our faith is that God can work through people like us who are continually restricting our duty to love. But God's grace is greater than our sin.

What does it mean to read the text with humility? By identifying with our dynamic equivalents rather than with Jesus or the samaritan we read the text with humility.

Where is the humor in this text? Even though it is tragic, there is humor in the blindness and restricted vision of the religious establishment. In seeking to define the meaning of the law; in seeking to maintain their purity; in thinking they had justified themselves by legal obedience;

they ended up breaking the law by failing to love. In this we must laugh at our own schemes of self-justification. In doing this we learn to take God more seriously and ourselves a little less so.

What does this text contribute to our church's self-understanding and mission in the world? This text ought to expand our vision for ministry. It tells us that anyone in need places a claim upon our love. The text sets us free from worry about ourselves and our own purity. It opens the door for involvement with those who are hurting and discarded. Jesus issues a strong exhortation based on the samaritans example, "Go and Do Likewise." This is a call for a mission of servanthood.

Church Context

During the fall of 1980, our country was involved in a political campaign in which the religious right in the United States was playing a new role. The Moral Majority had been formed as a political arm for Jerry Falwell's ultra-conservative, fundamentalistic religion. The Moral Majority and other right wing political-religious groups embarked on a holy war, of sorts, to rid the country of its so-called left wing, liberal politicians who were too soft on communism. The secular humanists were also their target. The right wingers saw Ronald Reagan the republican candidate, as the new messiah of

Americanism. They believed that conservative republicans would do away with abortion, defeat the E.R.A., restore prayer in the public schools, and rebuild America's military strength. Their campaign was an effort to save the country, to rebuke mainstream Protestant Christianity for its social gospel, and to elevate the flag and power of the United States around the world. God and Country were one and the same in Falwell's thinking.

Our congregation is 6 to 1 republican over democrat. However, they were not, in any large numbers, in the Moral Majority camp. Nevertheless, in the fall of 1980 the republicans were angry about the economy, about big government, about the United States' humiliation in Vietnam and Iran. Jimmy Carter, President of the United States, was seen as a weak, incompetent leader, who had contributed to the moral and political weakness of the nation. There was a great amount of arrogance and hatred in the air that fall. While not wanting to introduce my own politics into the pulpit, I did see this text as an opportunity to speak prophetically to the religious right.

Sermon: "Go and Do Likewise"

With this text we are at the heart of biblical religion. The biblical faith is captured in a nutshell in these readings. They express what God intends human life to be. They give us

guidance for how we are to relate to our fellowman. They state the fundamental principles of our faith, the first commandments, the way to eternal life. Listen! "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all of your soul and with all of your mind, and with all of your strength; and your neighbor as yourself." In other words, "Love God with the totality of your being, and your neighbor as yourself."

Even though we profess allegiance to these fundamentals of our faith, as members of the religious establishment, we have difficulty interpreting them. In our text we meet a lawyer, a representative of the religious order of his time. He was educated in the Old Testament and the history of its interpretation. By virtue of his education, experience, and accreditation he was an authority. To test Jesus he asks him a question to which he already knows the answer. "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responded, "How do you read the law, what does it say?" Like a good church school student the lawyer cited the catechism answer. He quoted Deuteronomy and Leviticus. "Love God with the totality of your being and your neighbor as yourself." But in giving this answer, he placed himself in the awkward position of being in agreement with Jesus whom he was testing. He almost seemed like one of the questioners in the recent presidential debate asking a question hoping the candidate would make a verbal blunder and thus expose a weakness that could then be exploited

in the course of the campaign. But there was no disagreement between Jesus and the lawyer. They both had read the law and were both committed to it as the revelation of God's will for human life. Out of gratitude for the liberating love of God, that had redeemed Israel from slavery and brought them to the promised land, the people were to love God and their neighbors.

But note: the religious community had done some interesting things with the second commandment from Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself." The lawyers had defined their neighbors as their fellow Jews. Anyone who was not a Jew could hardly be one's neighbor. In Deuteronomy 7 we read that the people who inhabited the promised land and who were non-Jewish, were to be slowly driven out of the land and destroyed. They were considered to be enemies, a threat to Israel, those who might weaken the social fabric and lead the faithful Israelites into idolatry. There could be no intermarriage. Israel's identity had to be maintained in order for it to be a light to the nations. In the days of accommodation with Assyria's idolatrous policies in the time of King Manessah and King Josiah these were important words to hear because Judah was about to lose its identity through its worship of the many gods. But in Jesus' time, that same warning had been misinterpreted and as a result, the religious establishment had built a wall around itself and its law.

Now lest we be too hard on the Jewish community of Jesus' time, let us translate this attitude toward "the neighbor beyond our camp" into the Christian church of our time. If we do not do this we simply breed anti-semitism and we fail to hear the message of our text. We do not have to listen very long to the voices of the 1980s to hear attitudes such as those expressed by the lawyer: "Who is my neighbor?" "Surely my neighbor is my fellow Christian and no one beyond our camp." "Non-Christians are not as moral as Christians. They are even a threat to our country. Their secular-humanistic life styles threaten to weaken America and lead us all to hell. Christians, therefore, are to separate themselves from their non-Christian fellow citizens, for to touch them, to become involved with them may defile and weaken us. A Christian nation must be prepared to destroy an atheistic, non-Christian, communist nation, to the glory of God."

In seeking to distinguish himself from Jesus and to continue his testing of Jesus, the lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Again, he knew the answer. His neighbors were his fellow Jews even as sometimes we regard our neighbors as our fellow Christians. Jesus responded with a story. This is a story that we all know very well. It is the parable of the good samaritan. One of the members of our church called me early this morning and asked, "What are you preaching on today?" I told her, "The Good Samaritan." She grew excited.

"Amen," she loudly exclaimed in my ear over the phone, "that's my story!" "I'm a good samaritan." Let us all hear the story again.

There was a certain man travelling down from Jerusalem to Jericho, seventeen miles through the desert, from 2,600 feet above sea level to nearly 1,200 feet below sea level. Jericho is still there. It is a beautiful "city of palms" near the Jordan River and Dead Sea. During his journey, the man was attacked by robbers, who stripped him, beat him and left him for dead. Since Jericho was a city where many priests lived, it was not out of the ordinary for some of them to be regularly travelling to Jerusalem and back to complete their temple service. As it happened, two representatives of the lawyer's religious community came upon this victimized Judean. One was a priest and the other a levite. When they saw the man, they walked by on the opposite side of the road and refused to become involved out of fear, perhaps, for their own lives, or out of a desire to maintain their own ceremonial purity that could be defiled if they touched a corpse. If that happened, they would lose their turn in the temple and also some income from that service. In a while, a samaritan, a non-Jew, an idolatrous half-breed, a non-Christian, if you will, came upon the scene, and he saw the victimized man and had compassion for him. He went to him, bound up his wounds, put the man on his horse, took him to the nearest hospital and paid his bill. Jesus asked, "Which of these three, the priest, the levite, or the

samaritan, proved neighbor to the man who fell among robbers?" Again, the lawyer and Jesus found themselves in agreement, as painful as that must have been for the lawyer. On the basis of the law of God, the lawyer answered, "The one who showed mercy upon him" And Jesus exhorted him, "Go and do likewise."

Let me ask you this morning: "How do you know that you love God?" "How do you know that the love of God is in your heart and soul?" Jesus has given us an answer, in this story, which we dare not forget. Our love of God is manifested in the spirit of neighborliness. It is not a question of who is my neighbor or of finding the right object to love; it is rather the question of whether the love of God is within me enabling me to reach out to whoever is before me and may be in need. To be able to love in word and deed is proof that God's spirit of love is within me. The Apostle John summarized Jesus' teaching in these words, "If any one says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." For Jesus, love of God always found expression in love of man. You cannot separate love of God and man.

Notice again, the man who proved to be a neighbor was the samaritan, a non-Jew, a non-Christian; a man who had no standing before God in the mind of the lawyer. Love of God and neighbor was expressed in the person's life who was considered by the church to be a heretic and a half-breed, a danger to the life of Israel---a danger to the life of the church. Now I want to

suggest to you this morning, that the only way that we can get inside this story is if we reinterpret it and tell it again in terms of our own situation today. I'm going to do this, and as you listen, if you find yourself becoming angry and threatened, then know that you are hearing the story in its original power and truth. Here it is:

"Rather than a priest and a levite walking down the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, we find two men walking the streets of an American inner city. Both of them consider themselves to be born again, American Christians. They are pillars of their city. One is a Rotarian, the other is a Kiwanian. One is a presbyterian, the other a baptist. One is a democrat and the other a republican. I won't tell you which. Both consider themselves to be successful advocates and supporters of the American system of capitalism, and they see a man lying in the gutter of the street. He is poor; he is black; he has been beaten; he is barely dressed; he could be dead. It is late in the evening and the parking lot is only a block away. Out of fear for themselves, or out of fear of violating certain political or economic theories, the two men walk by as quickly as possible with hardly a twitch of conscience. They do not wish to become involved out of fear that it may cost them something, or that they may be hurt in the process. But in a few minutes along comes another man on his way home from a meeting of the communist party. He is a

secular-humanist; he belongs to the A.C.L.U.; he does not believe there should be prayers in the public schools; he is not a Christian; he is an advocate of abortion; he believes in governmental welfare programs; he is fearful of the military-industrial complex in America; and believes in detente with the Russians, even at risk to American national security; he is an advocate of human rights and believes that America should only support those regimes which guarantee rights to their citizens. This man sees the man's problem. He has compassion, goes to him, lifts his bloody head out of the gutter, calls an ambulance, rides with him to the nearest hospital where he pays his bill for him. Upon leaving, he gives the man his calling card."

Jesus asks us in the contemporary church, "Which of these three, the presbyterian, the baptist, or the non-Christian?" "The democrat, the republican, or the communist proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" Of necessity, on the basis of all that we have read about the law of God, we find ourselves with the first century lawyer who responds, "The one who showed mercy upon him." In being forced to answer this way and to admit that someone beyond my camp is more obedient to the will of God than I am, I am irritated and aggravated. In having to admit that those who do not agree with me religiously, politically, or economically, may have more of the love of God in them than I do, even though I am a keeper

of the tradition---a born again, patriotic American, and a member of the true church, I am devastated. Yet Jesus says to me, "Follow the example of the one who showed mercy even if he has no standing in the nation, in the church, in the party to which I belong. Follow his example because the love of God is in him."

In this good samaritan we have a clue to what God has done for us through Jesus his Son. The Savior has come to us and found us left for dead beside the road of life. Indeed, we have been victimized by our sin. Death reigns over us. But Jesus comes and picks up us broken sinners. Anytime we think that God has rescued us from the gutter of sin because we deserve it, think again. Anytime we think that God's love is expressed only by our elect community, that God loves us to the exclusion of others whom we consider to be the immoral minority, forget it. God's love is an expression of his grace. The Savior came to seek and to save the lost so that the lost might begin to find other lost ones and rescue them.

What a wonderful truth it is that God can love us. Personalize it: that God can love me, me and my self-centeredness, me and my theological arrogance, me and my political, economic prejudices. If God can love me, one who is more like the priest and levite, than the samaritan, then maybe, just maybe, I can begin and we can begin to extend his mercy to

those along the way. Jesus says to us today, "Go and do likewise."

Sermon: "Rich Toward God"
Luke 12:13-21
Deuteronomy 12:1-28
October 12, 1980

Hermeneutical Questions

What is God doing in this situation? In what does life consist? Is the chief end of life to accumulate worldly possessions to the exclusion of the One who is the creator and giver of life? Of course not! The One who creates and gives life is to be the chief end of all human effort. Deuteronomy 5, the decalogue, says "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, and you shall not desire your neighbor's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's." To covet the things of this world is to become idolatrous. It is to confuse the gift with the giver. Deuteronomy 12 called Israel to make God the center of its life; to worship him in the one place that he would choose; to bring to the Lord the proper offerings in the proper place. The gifts of God were to be shared with the Levite.

In this text, Jesus warned those who would place their material blessings before all else to beware. God is the author of life. When God takes life away, the rich and the poor are at the same level. They brought nothing into the world and they will take nothing out. Therefore, Jesus challenged his hearers to be rich toward God, since God is the

giver of all good gifts.

With whom do we identify in this text? We must identify with the person concerned about his inheritance. Apparently, there was a conflict amongst the children of a family. Perhaps the older brother had inherited his parents estate and the younger brother had received nothing or very little. He felt an injustice had been done to him. He felt he should share more equitably in what his family had accumulated. It was a legitimate concern and the legal system was set up to resolve such disputes, but Jesus refused to function as a rabbinic judge. He had not come to negotiate such conflicts. He had come to bring God's salvation: I suspect that most of us hear the brother's question sympathetically and half-way think Jesus should have commanded a redistribution of the inheritance. But rather than do this, Jesus addressed the underlying threat to both brothers, and that was covetousness. The issue was life. Those of us who believe that we will have more life, or a better life, or a larger life, by increasing our material wealth, either through work, luck, or inheritance are badly mistaken. This is not to say that material things are unimportant. But as the chief end or ultimate concern of our lives they are impotent gods.

In the parable, we must identify with the rich fool. Here was a man who had everything. He made the fatal mistake of believing that his material wealth would make him happy

and secure for a long, good, pleasurable life, so he placed his trust in what he had accumulated rather than in God. In this man, we must see ourselves. For many, the number one concern of their lives is the building of a large estate. They invest in property, stocks, bonds, gold, silver, art, and anything else that promises to give a good yield. Their goal is to gain financial independence and security. Their goal is to travel, live in a beautiful home, and enjoy the good things of life. Wealth is power, and they protect their power by giving money to politicians who will defend their values and make it possible for them to get richer and richer. Their wealth is their god.

But Jesus terrifies us. He tells us that God is God and not ourselves, or our possessions. He reminds us that death reduces the rich man to nothing even as it does the poor man. God gives and takes life. The wisest thing a person can do then is to store up riches in heaven. While wealth may be a blessing of God, it is not God. Wealth places before us heavy responsibilities and temptations. Wealth makes it extremely difficult to be rich toward God and thus to enter God's Kingdom. But with God, all things are possible.

How was Luke re-presenting Deuteronomy and thereby adapting the older tradition to his situation? There is little verbal similarity between Deuteronomy 12 and Luke 12, yet the theological emphasis is the same. In Deuteronomy 12 the

faithful are called to be rich toward God. They are to worship God at the center of their nation, and to worship at the place he chooses. Once a year the people were to bring their offerings to the central sanctuary and dedicate them to the Lord. It was a festive gathering for all the people in which they offered to the Lord a tithe of all the Lord had given them. They were to share their blessings with the Levites and the poor. There was a recognition that God is the giver of gifts and that to offer to God his portion and to the Levite his portion is to be rich toward God.

The parable which Jesus told was about a man who put himself and his wealth first. It was the story of a covetous man who was an idolater. He had not established God at the center of his life. He was, therefore, a fool. He had forgotten that God had given him all that he had. The judgment of God fell upon him. He died. "Beware and harken, and thou shalt do all the commands which I charge thee, that it may be well with thee and with thy sons forever." Deuteronomy 12:28, "But God said to him, 'Fool!' This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Was Luke using the hermeneutic of prophetic critique or a constitutive hermeneutic? Luke employed a prophetic hermeneutic. If the rich are self-centered, and do not share

God's gifts, they are law-breakers. They have broken the commandment, "You shall not covet." The inversion of Deuteronomy's doctrine of election taught that if an individual was wealthy that was a sign of God's blessing and election. To be rich meant you were one of God's darlings. Luke addresses a prophetic word to the rich. To be sure, material things were considered the gifts of God, but to have them was to be entrusted with a responsibility to offer a portion of these gifts to God, the Levites, and the stranger. To be rich in things and poor toward God was to be an idolator. It was to come under the judgment of God.

But in this parable the grace of God was emphasized also. God is the giver of all good gifts. Having received God's grace, we are called to extend it to those in need. To store up treasure in heaven is to be a mediator of grace.

How do we read this text honestly? To be honest means that we see ourselves in this text. In the text we hear a warning given to us rich ones. The text calls us to repent of our self-centeredness. God's grace is great enough to forgive the soul that has seen the things of this world as ends in themselves. Believing this, I can re-establish my priorities. God and his Kingdom can be placed at the center of my life and I can begin to share the good gifts I have received. The practical implication is that I must become serious about the stewardship of all that I have been given.

Just because we have things, it does not mean that God loves us anymore than the poor.

What does it mean to read the text with humility? To hear the power of this parable, we must identify with the rich man. The truth is, we are rich. Especially in South Orange County, we are rich when seen in the light of the world's population. Are we rich because God loves us more than others, or because God has chosen us to be his own rich people? Are we rich because we have worked harder than others and deserve it? Are we rich because of historical accident? However we answer, the truth is, we are rich and often self-centered. In this story, we are terrified by the ending. What an injustice; to be rich and able to enjoy the good life, only to die before the pleasure is experienced. This parable threatens us and calls us to get right with God, not as a way of escaping death, but as a beginning of becoming rich toward God.

Where is the humor in this text? There is often humor in tragedy. Just when the rich man had it made, he lost everything in death. He discovered that life was not equivalent to material possessions. We must laugh at ourselves in this tragedy enough to take God much more seriously than ever before.

What does this text contribute to our church's self-understanding and mission in the world? It jolts us into an

awareness that the things we have ought not be ends in themselves. It calls us to a responsible stewardship of our material possessions. It reminds us that our mission in Laguna Beach is to call the rich to repentance and richness to God.

Church Context

This sermon was preached on Pledge Sunday, the day we dedicate our financial commitments for the next years budget. Each year our people have increased their giving even though they are not all pledgers. Just over 50 percent of our operating budget is underwritten by pledges. Those who pledge do pay their pledge. This text gave me an opportunity to deal with our wealth. Even though we have the highest per-capita giving in our Presbytery, I know that the giving in no way reveals a serious attitude toward financial stewardship. We are an upper middle-class community and if we were all tithers we would have an abundance of money with which to do mission. We are a self-centered church and community that seeks to keep an awareness of the needs of the outside world beyond the greenbelt that surrounds our city. Our number one concern is in accumulating wealth and in enjoying the material things which money will buy. Lest this judgment seem harsh, one need only review the life styles of our peoples as over against their giving patterns. I make it a point not to know what individuals give, but I do know from the general

statistics that we are not rich toward God.

Sermon: "Rich Toward God"

We have all discovered that we cannot live without an involvement with money and property. They bring a certain security and style to life that we have grown to appreciate. Better to have the things of the world than to be like the poor who, in some places, die for lack of food, clothing, and housing. Better to have enough of an estate to live in style during retirement years than to be the victim of unrelenting inflation. Of necessity, we are involved with things which create wealth. Any prudent person knows the necessity of wise management of financial affairs.

The church is involved with money and property. I'm one of the Trustees of the Southern California Presbyterian Foundation that is an important part of the United Presbyterian Foundation. Each year the Foundation receives millions of dollars in bequests designated for the mission of the United Presbyterian Church. We have people who specifically encourage the membership of the church to continue their stewardship of their estates long after their deaths by remembering the church in their wills. If it were not for the good people of the church with a vision for what it takes to run the church, the church would not survive for very long. On pledge Sunday we lay before the membership of our church a call for financial stewardship in regard to our local congregation.

We do so because we know that it takes wealth to do the mission of the church.

Stewardship education for christian living needs to begin in the family where we model for our children christian commitment. I'm especially concerned about teaching my eleven year old son how to manage money. Sex education is important, but what about responsible money management?

A few weeks ago, my wife and I visited our tax service to review our tax status for the coming year. While we were in the office we discovered a book entitled A Kid's Guide to Managing Money by Joy Wilt.¹⁰ Since my son and I were going to a father-son retreat for the weekend, we took the book along and he read it to me in the car as we travelled to the conference center. It's a cartoon type book and he was able to read the whole book to me before we arrived. We learned the history of money from the trading of animals and other items, to the discovery of precious metals which ultimately were transformed into money. The book reported on the various ways children can make money, like on an allowance from parents, or simply by finding it on the street. Children may provide services and be payed for them like: washing cars or dishes, or mowing the law. They can sell things like: old toys and games, or used halloween costumes. I did not know that

¹⁰Joy Wilt, A Kid's Guide to Managing Money (Waco: Word Books, 1978).

children could make money in so many creative ways. With a little bit of imagination a child can become a millionaire. In our neighborhood, children conduct garage sales. Recently, one of our son's friends has begun to rent and show films on his parents video tape machine and to charge admission. Although it was a simple cartoon book, it was a basic text on economics. I only wish I could have read a book like this as a child. I thought as my son read, this is how it all begins for us. Whether in reading a book, or listening to our parents, or going to school, or by observing behavior, or by being driven by our needs and wants, we have learned to appreciate and to accumulate money and property with the realization that life requires this process. Many have learned that the process is really fun. Some of you are grinning from ear to ear because you know the joy of succeeding and the misery of failing.

In listening to my son read the book to me, I thought of the man in the story which Jesus told. Let's name him "Soul," because that's what he called himself. Soul was a rich farmer, who had gone to agricultural school, where he learned the secrets of being a successful businessman. As a result, he became very wealthy; he was our kind of man. He knew a good piece of land when he saw it. He knew how to buy it at the right price, develop it, and sell it for a profit. Soul was the kind of fellow who could invest in gold at \$200 an ounce and sell it a couple of years later at \$700 an ounce. Soul had the eye to spot a fixer-upper in Laguna

beach, invest \$50,000 in it and six months later turn a \$100,000 profit. Soul was literally having a ball! Everything he touched turned to gold; he had the "midas touch." His crops were so abundant that his barns could no longer contain them. He had to open savings accounts in every bank in the county. He desperately needed tax shelters. The more he made, the more he invested, and he built longer, newer barns, and built a large enough estate to last three lifetimes. There was nothing Soul could not enjoy. He not only drank Chivas Regal, he bought it by the caseload. He ate at the finest restaurants. In the winter he skied Aspen, Vail, Park City and Austria. He played tennis three times a week at the club. He kept his boat at the harbor, although he rarely used it enough to justify the expense. He vacationed in Hawaii, Mexico, and Europe. He finally said to himself one day, "Soul you have saved enough to live on easy street the rest of your years, take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry. You've got it made; you're the fulfillment of the American dream." I see Soul as the man on the popular poster standing in front of the new Rolls Royce, dressed in his smart english riding suit, holding a bottle of champaign and glass, with a sweet smile on his face. The caption reads, "Poverty Sucks." That's ole Soul for you.

All those things he had learned as a child from the books he had read, from his parents, and from his classes in

college, had really paid off. He had produced a financial empire that allowed him all the security and enjoyment he ever wanted. He had life in his firm grip. But God said to him that very night, "Fool, this night your soul is required of you and the things you have accumulated, whose will they be? What a distressing development! What a shock! At the very moment of fulfillment and security; when life was realized, and every need satisfied; at that very moment, he died." All that he had prepared would pass on to someone else, I suppose to "little Soul." He could have written this bit of wisdom, "I had great possessions, I gathered for myself silver and gold; I became great and surpassed all who were before me in this city; whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them, but I hated all my toil in the end, seeing that I had to leave it all to the man who would come after me, to "little Soul", and who knows whether he will be a wise man or like his Dad, a fool. For he will be master of all for which I have toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. Vanity of vanities." And Jesus said, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

In this parable, Jesus is not saying that material things are evil or that one ought not to work for himself, his family, or to build an estate. God has created all there is to be enjoyed. Christians have often assumed that the poor are more virtuous than the rich. This is to misread this story. Jesus gave this teaching to warn the rich

and the poor against covetousness. To be covetors is to be guilty of idolatry, and rich and poor can be guilty of this sin. This parable was given as a call to place God the Creator at the center of life, rather than the gifts of the Creator. But wealth poses some special temptations and problems. We can easily suppose that the gifts of creation give life rather than the Creator. Riches can easily become the center, our ultimate concern, the single objective of our lives. We can actually grow to measure the value we and others have by the magnitude of our possessions. To falsely assume that possessions give life is to be foolish, why? Because none of the things of this world can deliver what we think they promise. Wealth cannot make us healthy, happy or secure. Riches cannot guarantee the human soul eternal life. All that we accumulate we will one day lose because we cannot take it with us. Therefore, the one objective we ought to pursue above all others is a richness toward God, a treasure that transcends this life. We have yet to see a hearse pulling a "You Haul" trailer to the cemetery.

Last weekend at the father-son conference we heard Keith Erickson, formerly of the L. A. Lakers, and now a television announcer for the Lakers, speak. He was on the first of the U.C.L.A. National Basketball Championship Teams. He went on to successfully play for 13 years with the Lakers. During that time, he was a great success in the eyes of the

world, but privately, even though he had become famous and wealthy, his life was coming unglued. He was becoming an alcoholic and a compulsive gambler. He began a spiritual quest that led him from Zen Buddhism into the occult. Near the end of his pilgrimage, he was actually consulting witches in order to guarantee his gambling successes. He said he rejected christianity because his best friend went to church every Sunday and lived like a pagan the rest of the week. Finally, in an attempt to preserve the longevity of his career in the National Basketball Association, he sought out a nutritionist who could help him eat the right foods so that his body could last for many years and he could make even more money. The nutritionist turned out to be a caring christian person who saw, through Keith's questions, that he was in search for his soul. With sensitivity, he opened the Bible to Keith and began to bear witness to the love and grace of God as the source of life. Keith shared, "Miraculously, I began to believe in God and I became spiritually rich, rich in my soul. I learned that to truly be rich meant to place God at the center of my life and to serve his cause by sharing my blessings."

During the children's sermon this morning, I told you all that there are three ways to use money. We can save our money. We can spend our money. As Christians, we need to know also that God asks us to share our money and wealth. As we learn to share our material blessings with others we grow

spiritually rich. Yes, it is true, the richness of our soul is increased by the abundance of our giving. To give is to lay up treasure in heaven as Jesus said. To give is to invest in a place that cannot be destroyed; where interest rates do not fluctuate; where markets do not crash; where panic is non-existent; and where the power of death cannot leave us poor. This morning as we are together as one family considering our material gifts and our stewardship responsibilities, let us decide to be "rich toward God."

Sermon: "Freedom From Anxiety"
Luke 12:22-34
Deuteronomy 12:20-32
October 19, 1980

Hermeneutical Questions

What is God doing in this situation? God can be trusted. He gives the gifts which make life possible. He sustains the creation. God feeds and clothes the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. If God cares for the creation by meeting its basic needs, ought we not to trust that our needs will be met? God gives life. We cannot do that even by anxious striving. There is only one thing we ought to seek and around which our lives should be organized, and that is God's Kingdom. If the Kingdom is our number one priority, then our basic needs for food, clothing and shelter will be satisfied by the Lord. This awareness frees us to share God's good gifts.

With whom do we identify in this text? Jesus knew that his disciples would have to deal with anxiety. Anxious striving after the things of the world in search of security, success, and life, is characteristic of "the nations of the world." Christian disciples are not immune. Like ancient Israel, they are tempted to act like the surrounding nations who are idolatrous, seeking their security in the anxious worship of gods who promise safety, satisfaction, and fertility.

We must then identify with the nations. However, there is value in identifying with the ravens. God feeds them; will he not also feed us? We also need to identify with the lilies. They are clothed with more beauty than Solomon enjoyed. God clothes the flowers of the field; will he not also clothe us? We are the "men of little faith." We seek food, drink, and clothing. We have anxious minds. The Lord calls us to become people of faith; to surrender our anxiety and receive the good gifts of the creator. Faith is a perspective that we are not the ultimate owners; God is. Therefore, we are to work and be worthy, but we are not to consider ourselves the owner. Therefore, be not anxious.

How was Luke re-presenting Deuteronomy and thereby adapting the older tradition to his situation? As Israel entered the holy land they were to remain separate from the nations which lived in the land. The Lord was about to destroy these nations who, because of anxious striving, had become the worst of idolaters. The Lord would provide for all of Israel's needs in the land. Jesus' disciples are warned not to be like "the nations" who seek things out of anxiety. Disciples are to trust God and not give in to idolatry.

Luke has carried the message of Deuteronomy over into the church. God is the giver of life and no other gods can provide. Only God can provide for his people.

Mammon is impotent as a god. Therefore, disciples are to be people of faith. This does not mean that they will have no interest in material things. But they will know that God alone provides for his people.

Was Luke using the hermeneutic of prophetic critique or a constitutive hermeneutic? He uses both. God is the one who constitutes Israel and who maintains her life. He promises to provide for his people's needs as long as they seek first his Kingdom. But if they begin to conform to "the nations" and worship mammon, then surely they will lose, not only peace of mind, but also their false treasures. In this text, there is both promise and warning. Election demands obedience and faithfulness to the God who places his love upon his people. Notice, this is a word of promise and warning spoken to disciples, to the flock, to the church. It has relevance for the individual, but it is in its essence, a word for the people of God on their way toward the realized Kingdom of God.

How do we read this text honestly? God works with people who are constantly tempted to pursue the things of this world as ends in themselves. In doing so, we violate God's will. But God's grace is at work amongst us idolaters. As we read this text, we know that we anxious disciples are being called to a deeper faith in the love and power of God. Once we are confident in God's power to provide and sustain,

then we can begin to be free, not only of anxiety, but also of the things in which we have trusted.

What does it mean to read the text with humility? We are reading with humility when we identify with the anxious nations. We are humble when we can see ourselves in the ravens and the lilies. We are humble when we allow this text to reveal how little our faith really is. We are humble when we see ourselves as a part of the "little flock."

Where is the humor in this text? The contrast between human striving, anxiety, insecurity, and the unfretful birds and plants must cause us to laugh at ourselves. If these inhuman parts of the creation are cared for and maintained by God, will he not care for those who are charged with giving names to every living thing? Will not God care for the crown of his creation? We cannot help but take God more seriously.

What does this text contribute to our church's self-understanding and mission in the world? We are a people who must learn to radically trust in God. We are continually tempted to live life on our own terms; to seek security and success on the world's terms. All too easily we find ourselves worshipping the gods of the nations. What Jesus teaches us is liberating. He promises that trust in God can free us from anxiety. It is God's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom, to bring us into its full realization. This is an

eschatological promise. This means we must learn to live by faith in the promises of God. Once again we find ourselves at one with God's people in all generations.

Church Context

In doing the sermon on the rich fool it became clear that an additional word needed to be spoken. The Christian disciple must live in a world which constantly seeks to press him into its own mold. "The nations" seek food, drink, and clothing as if these things give life. The pursuit of these things can become our ultimate concern. If so, we become anxious about life. In the fall of 1980, it was clear to me that many in our own congregation were anxious about these things. Indeed, I myself have felt this anxiety on regular occasions. This has led to anxious striving and deeper frustration. Along with others I have watched the Dow Jones indicators and feared for my security and the life of the church. A word of God was needed during our stewardship season on the perils of anxious striving. Many in our church needed to hear the call to seek God's Kingdom first with the promise that God would provide the basic needs of life. Since October was pledge season, this seemed an excellent text to use in helping our people feel the freedom to give. Indeed, giving symbolizes a people's trust in God.

Sermon: "Freedom From Anxiety"

Last week I made the point that we are legitimately concerned with the things of this world. As persons and families we function by using the material things of the creation. The church is also legitimately concerned about the things of the world. If it were not for money and property contributed by God's people, the church would have difficulty in doing its mission. Thank God, we live in a nation where we have the freedom to pursue our potential and to enjoy the good things of God's creation. Our concern is that all people might be fed and enabled to enjoy the good gifts of the creation.

But let me ask: "What if our concern for the things of this world becomes anxious striving in order to secure our own survival?" As we look around the world today, there is one word that characterizes the nations. The word is "anxiety." Our's has been called "the age of anxiety." What does it mean to be anxious? To be anxious is to be fearful or worried about the events of today or tomorrow. To be anxious leads to a destructive striving after the things of this world in which we place our trust. We hope the acquiring of material things will free us from our fears and insecurities. Our inner anxiety leads us to take our lives into our own hands in order to establish and guarantee our own identity and destiny.

Jesus was aware that anxiety plays a major role in

human life. He described the nations as anxious. As representatives of the nations we ask, "What shall we eat?" "How shall we clothe ourselves?" "Where shall we live?" "Do we have enough money to buy the house we desire?" "Do we have enough in our savings for an emergency or crisis?" "Have we accumulated a large enough estate to sustain us in our retirement years?" "How can we face the reality of aging and death in a youth oriented culture?" Slowly, but surely, legitimate concern and work can be replaced by worry, fear, unbelief, and anxious striving in any Christian's life. Yes, Christians can become like the people of the world. In seeking to provide for their own security with the things of the world, Christian faith can become anxious doubt.

Ancient Israel was warned that they ought not be like the surrounding nations who were characterized by anxious striving after the things of the world. Israel, in seeking to guarantee her own security and survival built altars and shrines to the gods of the surrounding people. These gods guaranteed the fertility of the land and the womb. These gods promised success to armies, political, and economic systems. In seeking to be successful like the surrounding people, Israel became idolatrous. Anxiety about the future led them to become like the nations. As a result, their national life disintegrated; their spiritual values were destroyed and the judgment of God fell upon them. In this historical context,

the Book of Deuteronomy was found in the Temple and it was used by King Josiah to create a reformation. Deuteronomy called Israel away from an anxious striving, seeking to be secure and successful, to a radical trust in the faithfulness of God. Jesus stood in a long prophetic tradition in warning his disciples about anxious striving after the things of the world.

But how do we keep legitimate concern and work from turning into anxious striving, destructive fear, and pagan idolatry? Over the summer I read Richard Foster's Celebration of Discipline - The Path to Spiritual Growth. He suggests that a Christian needs a place to stand in our anxious world. "Give me a place to stand and I will move the earth,"¹¹ one man said. But where does the Christian stand in order to preserve his true life in an anxious time? Foster says that a Christian stands only if he or she is committed to a lifestyle of simplicity. Only this commitment is able to deal with anxiety. This requires a discipline of simplicity.¹² To live this lifestyle, the Kingdom of God and its righteousness must become our number one priority. Then everything necessary for our lives will be received. "Focus upon the kingdom produces the inward reality of the kingdom."¹³ The reality

¹¹Richard Foster, Celebration of Discipline - The Path to Spiritual Growth (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 74.

¹²Ibid., 75.

¹³Ibid., 76.

of the Kingdom replaces anxiety. The Kingdom becomes the central focus for all those who would overcome pagan, anxious idolatry. The desire to escape the rat race cannot be central. The desire to enrich the family cannot be central. The desire to secure our economic future cannot be central. The desire to preserve the economic life of the nation cannot be central. Our concern for physical health and youth cannot be central. Not even the redistribution of the world's wealth or concern for the world's ecology can be allowed to become central. To be set free of anxiety, the Kingdom of God must become our dominate concern. As we seek God's Kingdom, we learn first hand, that God provides for the basic needs of food, clothing, and housing.

Commitment to God's Kingdom requires that we cultivate three inner attitudes. As we do so we are set free from anxiety. First, we must learn to see that life is the gift of God. Like many of you, I have been watching Carl Sagan's Cosmos series on Public Television. He makes the point that fifteen billion years ago our cosmos was flung into space as a given. Whether by accident, or by a long chemical, evolutionary process, or by divine fiat, all that is, came into being. I do not have to study the stars to know that life is a gift. Each time I hold a child at a baptismal service, I experience the truth that life is the gift of God. Each time I enjoy a deep breath of fresh air, I know life is a gift. Each time I unite a man and a woman in marriage,

I experience the reality of the gift of love. If life is a gift, then I must learn to affirm it, to celebrate it, to relax in it, and let that reality become the number one foundation of my existence. Life comes to us each from the hand of almighty God.

Secondly, I need also to cultivate the inner attitude that affirms the goodness of God's care for his creation. God promises to care for his creation. Jesus says, "Consider the ravens. God cares for them." I'm glad that God cares for them because I dislike crows. The crows live in a colony up by my house and some of them are fatter than the fattest chickens. God cares for these scavengers of the sky. Jesus says that we are more valuable to God than the crows. Will he not feed us? "Consider the lilies of the field," Jesus says, "God clothes them." If God cares for the flowers of the field, then surely God cares for us. Can we not trust God with the fundamental needs of life such as food, clothing and housing?

Thirdly, if we are to be free from anxiety, we need to cultivate the inner attitude that sees material things as gifts to be shared with others. Nothing frees us from anxiety like making our goods available for the good of the community in which we fellowship and serve. "Fear not little flock," Jesus says, "it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." If God cares for us, then we can loosen our hold

on some of the things we have by sharing them in the spirit of Christian stewardship. Giving builds our treasure in heaven. Knowing that our ultimate destiny is in God's Kingdom, we gain a freedom which reveals itself in charitable giving.

If you are like me, you need to be free from anxiety about the basic things of human existence. We can become free by establishing God's Kingdom at the center of our lives, as our first concern. We do that by cultivating these inner attitudes. First, life is a gift. Second, God will sustain our life. Third, God's gifts are meant to be shared. As we train our attitudes, we learn that anxiety is replaced by faith and we become free.

Sermon: "The Test of Time"
Luke 12:35-48
Deuteronomy 13:1-5
October 26, 1980

Hermeneutical Questions

What is God doing in this situation? From the perspective of Christian existence, it sometimes appears as if God is absent. The master has gone away with a promise of return. It is God's will that His servants watch and prepare themselves for the return of the master. God's Kingdom has come in Jesus. But from the ascension of Jesus to the coming of the Son of Man, it may appear that Jesus has gone away forever and the promise will never be fulfilled. God places His disciples in the tension between promise and fulfillment. God does this in order to test us. In between the times, we are to watch, wait, and be faithful in our stewardship. The Son of Man is coming when we least expect Him. God will fulfill His promise. God has His own timetable. God will hold His servants accountable for their actions during His apparent absence. Those who have acted irresponsibly will be judged and punished. Those who have stood the test and remained faithful will receive greater responsibilities.

It has been suggested that Luke seeks to deal with the problem of the delayed parousia in this passage. What if it is a long time between the first and second coming of Jesus? Will not His disciples lose their faith and act irresponsibly

if the delay is long? However one reads this passage, whether as encouragement for a church that has grown weary in waiting, or as instruction for disciples who will one day lead the church, the theology is the same. God keeps and ensures His own promises. God has His own timetable and often he places his people in the test of time to prepare them for entry into the promised land and into greater areas of service.

With whom do we identify in this text? We are those who wait for the master to return. Will we be ready for the eschatological fulfillment of the Kingdom when the Son of man comes? The New Testament is filled with this challenge. The messianic banquet is being prepared, but will we be ready to sit at the table when the master comes? He is coming when we least expect Him. Our temptation is real. The waiting grows long. We become impatient and finally we lose our faith. We stop believing that our master is coming and as a result we become harsh, insensitive leaders of the church. With Peter we must hear the warning in this parable. If one is a leader in the church, much will be required. To know God's will and refuse to do it is to incur the severest penalty. Blessed are those who are awake and ready to receive the Son of man who will come like a thief in the night.

How was Luke re-presenting Deuteronomy and thereby adapting the older tradition to his situation? Deuteronomy

13:1-5 which is correlated to Luke 12:35-48 is a warning against false prophets who dream dreams and give signs and wonders. On the basis of those dreams, signs, and wonders they say "Let's go after other gods and let us serve them." The Lord God uses these false prophets to test his people to see if they will remain faithful and continue to love the Lord God with the totality of their being. The prophet that leads God's people into idolatry is to be put to death. In ancient Israel, leadership was a responsibility that required faithful obedience to God. Above everything else, leaders were to keep their people free from idolatry.

Luke's Jesus resignifies the Deuteronomy text by teaching His disciples to be faithful and obedient to God no matter what the circumstances. As time passes the disciples may be tempted to think that God will not keep his promises. But God is faithful even though God may seem absent. Disciples must watch and prepare themselves for the coming of the Son of man. Christian leaders are to be faithful and wise stewards who are performing their duties when the master comes. There is an interesting contrast between the false prophet who leads the people into idolatry and the faithful steward who does the job the master has given him to do until he returns.

Was Luke using the hermeneutic of prophetic critique or a constitutive hermeneutic? Luke's Jesus used the hermeneutic

of prophetic critique to warn his disciples. They dared not take their election for granted. If they were not watching and ready for the coming of the Son of man, the judgment of God would fall upon them. Especially did Luke's Jesus call into question the election of the leadership of the christian church. Peter's question, "Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?" is our question. Jesus' parable makes it clear that His warning is for those disciples who are stewards of the gospel and the church between Jesus' ascension and His second coming. For those disciples who are unfaithful to their duty, they will face judgment at the masters return. The faithful will be rewarded. Much is required of those who are members of God's people and who lead. Election and covenant obedience, faith and works are vital parts of God's truth. One without the other is inadequate.

How do we read this text honestly? We cannot escape this text. Jesus speaks directly to his disciples. By God's grace we are His chosen disciples. But grace must be balanced by gratitude in the lives of the chosen ones. In this parable, Jesus moved quickly to our question: "What ought we to do in response to the grace of God?" The answer: "Watch, wait, be ready for the coming of the Son of man. Be faithful stewards even if the parousia seems delayed. God will keep his promises. The promise will be fulfilled and the faithful disciples will be rewarded. The unfaithful stewards will be judged and

punished." In this text we must moralize.

What does it mean to read the text with humility? As we identify with the disciples who often feel that God is absent and His promises unsure, we hear the power of this teaching. Often our loins are not girded, nor our lamps burning. If the Son of man were to come, it would be a traumatic experience for us. His coming would be like a thief in the night. Our duty is to care for the flock which is our charge. But if God is absent and the Lord has gone away never to return, are we not tempted to behave in any selfish, cruel way we choose? To whom are we accountable? Jesus reminds us that the day of reckoning is coming.

Where is the humor in this text? The disciples had a problem with sleepiness and so do we. They were not ready for what was coming in Jerusalem. Would they be ready in the hour of testing when their Lord was taken away? We know our own lack of spiritual perception. We cannot help but laugh and cry at ourselves. How often have we missed the importance of the moment? This text calls us to take God seriously, to listen, to wake up. (Romans 13:11-14).

What does this text contribute to our church's self-understanding and mission in the world? It calls us to be vigilant in the present. This is no call to set dates for the second coming as many Orange County fundamentalist do.

This is a challenge to be the responsible people of God, now. We in Laguna Beach have received much and this means that we have a greater responsibility for sharing what we have. Our Lord may come at any time. The Kingdom has come; it is coming. We are to be an eschatological people. If we lose the transcendent dimension of our theology, we may drift into idolatry. However, the Kingdom is also imminent. The church lives in the tension between promise and fulfillment. In this tension, we are tested as we wait and serve.

Church Context

In October 1980, we began to receive our pledge reports. The pledges were coming in with a good increase. By October 26 we had received 170 pledges totaling \$120,000, or \$706 on the average. We still needed to receive another 100 pledges. I was conducting small group meetings throughout our parish area seeking to interpret the building restoration plan presented by the church's architect. This involved many evening meetings. We were seeking input and feedback. I was seeking to build support for doing what was urgently needed if we were to be faithful in maintaining our mission base. Our church had been sleeping while its buildings were deteriorating. The test was before us. Could we wake up, prepare ourselves for the One coming, and thus demonstrate we had been faithful in our stewardship of His gifts for mission? Could we rebuild our physical facility while increasing our program, operating

budget? In two or three of the home meetings, the architect and I had to deal with considerable conflict. We allowed the conflict to surface and made our case. In January 1981 we had our restoration pledging banquet. It was a great success. Our people pledged \$700,000 to be paid over three years. One of the needs our mission study had revealed was more understanding of presbyterian worship. Each Sunday we decided to have an insert in our bulletin on worship. With so many things happening and with so much planned for the future, the text in Luke 12:35-48 seemed appropriate in challenging our congregation to realize we were being tested. Would we rise to the occasion and be good stewards of God's gifts?

Sermon: "The Test of Time"

About this time each year we become aware that we are waiting for something. Halloween is coming with its tricks and treats. Across the street Eschbach's Floral shop is decorating for the holidays just a few weeks away. Many are planning their Thanksgiving dinner. Turkey, dressing, pumpkin and hot mince pie await. I can hardly wait. Visions of Christmas dance in our children's eyes as they see beautifully decorated trees, brightly wrapped gifts, special decorations in the church, families together, caroling and ole St. Nick in his bright red suit.

As a child, I could hardly make it from Halloween to Christmas. There was so much promised in the following weeks. There was so much expected. The days were counted; the hours seemed long. In a thousand ways, I pondered the promise of the holiday season. I yearned for the fulfillment of all my dreams.

It's difficult to hang in there with patience and love when you're caught in the tension between promise and fulfillment. As Christmas grew near, my parents sang to me and my sister:

Better watch out,
Better not cry,
Santa Claus is coming to town.
He's making a list and checking it twice,
Gonna find out who's been naughty and nice.
Santa Claus is coming to town.

How difficult it was to be the kind of kid that Santa Claus could reward with he finally arrived. Those tender years taught me that waiting for the fulfillment of life's promises is not easy. One can become impatient and angry. The wait may be frustrating and boring. You want to cop out and withdraw. The thing or event for which you are waiting seems so far away that you're tempted to begin acting like a nasty kid. I would pick on my sister. She'd tease me and I'd poke her, gently of course. Soon we'd both get disciplined. Mom would make us sit in chairs looking peacefully at each other. That was worse than the spanking. Those were wonderful years.

The Bible teaches us that God places His people in the

tension between promise and fulfillment. The Book of Deuteronomy was first given as a series of sermons for a people who had become a nation, and who had learned first hand how difficult it was living somewhere between the promise of God and it's fulfillment. These sermons challenged the nation to be faithful to its God, even when tempted to worship other gods. Even if a prophet produced dreams, signs, and wonders, Israel was not to forsake Yahweh. As a nation they had a vision of what God's Kingdom would one day be, but the vision was never completely fulfilled in their experience. As year after year passed, each new generation had to choose to be faithful in that tension between promise and fulfillment.

To do so they had to stay awake to the promises of God to bless them and make of them a great nation that would bless the world. They were required to stay committed to the truth that there was one God who demanded absolute obedience. The preachers who gave the sermons of Deuteronomy informed the people that God had placed them in this tension in order to test them; to test their faith, to see if they would remain his faithful people; to make them stronger in faith; to see if they would persevere until the promise was fulfilled; even though Yahweh seemed distant, uninvolved, or absent. So the preacher said,

The Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Positioned between promise and fulfillment, Jesus of Nazareth stood in that long tradition of deuteronomic preachers and taught his disciples that we too must learn to live in the gap between his first and second coming, when the Kingdom of God will be fully realized and the promises of God fulfilled. As God's people we live in an interim time. In this time, "Our loins are to be girded; our lamps are to be burning; we are to be waiting for our master's return." His return will be like a thief in the night for the unprepared. At an unexpected time, the promise will be fulfilled. Are we ready?

God has entrusted His household to us. As members of the church, we are His stewards, charged with doing the master's will. If we conclude that the master will not fulfill his promise, and we begin to mistreat and use people; if we give in to the desires of the flesh and lose our spiritual sensitivity then as His stewards we will be judged and punished. Yes, the Lord's coming may require a long wait; and that waiting time may become a time of testing for us. Will we be faithful? One of our catholic brothers has written concerning our testing:

Our faith is put to the test of time. We are the servants of an absent Lord. We are tempted at times to think that He has forgotten us, that he does not listen to our prayers, and that He has abandoned us. These moments of testing give us opportunities to gain the virtues of fidelity and perseverance. No virtue is of much value until it has been put to the test. We have to pass through a dark night of seeming desolation---not the death of God, but the eclipse of God---only thus can we prove ourselves to be loyal servants. And to help us, Christ instituted the

eucharist, "The Lord's Supper," which is a reminder of what He did at His first coming and of our future encounter with him. "Christ has died," "Christ is risen;" "Christ will come again." Therefore we must think of ourselves as servants awaiting our master and patiently go about the tasks which He has given us to do.¹⁴

I wish we had time to speak in detail of the experience which all people of faith have experienced---the times when God's presence seemed eclipsed. Like an eclipse of the sun, suddenly the light and warmth of God's presence is clouded and shut out. The world becomes a frozen, gray winterland. It seems as if spring shall never come. The God of love, harmony, health, well being, and freedom has gone away. He has become an absent master and we are left to ourselves in a threatening world, dependent on our own resources, vulnerable to the enemies attacks.

From Job to Jesus we hear the cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why have you left me in this God forsaken moment, place or relationship?" We ask ourselves, "How can I hold on? How can I wait? How can I behave responsibly out here in this 'no-man's land' between the promise and the fulfillment of life?" Yet the Lord lets us live there with his absence, with his silence to test us, to see if the virtues of patience, vigilance, and faithfulness will spring to life and grow within us. Mysteriously, God uses the test of time to grow the finest flowers in his garden. In the tension

¹⁴John Bligh, Christian Deuteronomy Luke 9-18 (New York: Alba House, 1975), 73.

between the promise and its fulfillment we learn to affirm with the Apostle Paul,

We rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

Yes, our lives are lived out in that interim time between the promise and the fulfillment. What I learned as a child about the time between Halloween and Christmas has become a parable of Christian life for me. The central issue for me has become, can I maintain my Christian identity and continue to grow in the fruits of Christ's Spirit as I faithfully await the master's return? Will I be a responsible steward of that which God has entrusted to me. Will I do God's will in using my time, in spending my money, in loving my family, in serving my church, in sharing my witness, in preserving the earth's ecology, in helping the poor, in working for justice, in being a peacemaker? Or will I burn out, give up, tune out, and perish somewhere in the desert between the promise and the fulfillment.

In a broader sense, these are questions for the whole people of God. Will the church be the church God intended it to be? Will we do God's will in being awake and ready for the coming of the Son of man? Will we be faithful stewards of God's grace? The warning of judgment and punishment for the unfaithful steward ought to shock the leadership of the

church into a responsible, prayerful, obedient stewardship. Time itself is a test of our stewardship. Time is God's test, God's school. May we have His grace to persevere to the end, knowing that with the Lord, one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise. He is forbearing toward us, not willing that any should perish.

Sermon: "Appearances Are Deceiving"
Luke 14:7-24
Deuteronomy 20:1-8
November 9, 1980

Hermeneutical Questions

What is God doing in this situation? In Jesus, the Kingdom of God broke into our world. The final day had dawned. The eschaton was at hand. The long expected messianic banquet was ready to begin because the messiah was present and he was inviting people to come and sit at table with him. In Jesus, God was bringing his salvation to fulfillment, and blessed were those who had eyes to see and ears to hear. Blessed were those who knew the day of their visitation. Blessed were those who could receive Jesus as the Prince of Peace and join in table fellowship with all God's people. Blessed were those who knew their spiritual need and poverty, who were happy to be admitted to the banquet hall, let alone be seated at the head table.

In the parable of Luke 14, Jesus told his disciples that God was giving a banquet, and the invitations had been mailed. The hooker in the parable was that the religious community, the elect, the righteous ones, the church, the invitees, had refused to come to the party. In offering excuses to God they revealed their lack of faith. Their excuses reflected the reasons for which men were excused from holy war. (Deuteronomy 20) Since those invited refused to

come, the outsiders, the poor, the sick, the maimed, the lame and the blind, were invited. In this parable we see the freedom of the God of grace. If the "apparently elect" will not come to the party and the so-called "non-elect" do come, then who are the elect? The truly elect are those who are the weak, the poor, the sick, the helpless, the sinners, the dispossessed, and all those who know their need of God's grace. This parable teaches us the meaning and power of God's grace. At the same time, it stands as a testimony to the freedom of God. God is not bound to any people, church, or group that refuses to accept his invitation.

With whom do we identify in this text? Using the principle of dynamic analogy, we identify with the representatives of the religious community. The Pharisees were the churchmen of their time. They were at the top. They had it made. They were the good presbyterians. Like we modern upper, middle class pharisees, they knew how to play the game of upward mobility. They were not bashful in asserting themselves in situations where power and influence were bought and sold. They were accustomed to jockeying for positions of honor and prestige. Jesus observed their efforts to position themselves in places of honor, therefore he taught them a lesson on humility. Jesus' words illumine our own lack of humility. Social, political, and religious power are often revealed in the life of the church.

Whom do we welcome into our fellowship? In our evangelism, it is often the people who are most like us, or those who would be a credit to the church, that we seek to win. We desire to be associated with other good, white, middle-class, christians, who hold similar values and political ideologies. Why else would a church have a 6 to 1 ratio of republicans to democrats? Are presbyterians of necessity those who are captains of industry and business? Is it an accident that we mainly endorse law and order, look askance at social welfare, oppose busing, and governmental control of business? When Jesus tells us to invite into our fellowship the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind, our sensitivities and commitments are offended. Like his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, we are threatened and offended by any suggestion that God might also love the poor and imperfect.

In the parable, Luke's Jesus told, we identify with those invited to the messianic banquet. We have received God's invitation to come to his party, but we refuse to come. We send our regrets. Surely, our regrets are couched in good biblical terms. They reflect the allowable reasons for not participating in holy war. There is property to handle. There is business to do. There are pressing family matters. Therefore, we send in our excuses. Since the invitees will not come to the party, others are invited. God's party will not be empty. The poor and imperfect will be brought in to celebrate the coming of the messiah. Where does this leave

the church? It causes us to question our understanding of God. If we think God loves self-righteous, power seeking presbyterians, to the exclusion of those whom we reject as worthy, we had better rethink our theology. Those who come to the messianic banquet are those who know their need of God's love. They know their weakness and sin. They know they have no claim upon God. They are the poor and broken, the contrite of heart, who are amazed that the call included them. This parable calls the church, us good presbyterians, to repentance. It reveals our pride and resistance to the truth of the gospel. It calls into question our doctrine of election, that so often is built on the false notion that God loves only us, or people like us. This parable puts us in touch with our need for forgiveness. It promises that if we repent, face our sin, and respond to the invitation that we may indeed, like ancient Israel, find ourselves, along with the poor and imperfect of the world, in God's kingdom.

How was Luke re-presenting Deuteronomy and thereby adapting this older tradition to his situation? Deuteronomy 20:5-8 is parallel to Luke 14:15-35. The three excuses given by the Keklemenoi are based on the four causes for deferment from serving in the army of the Holy War of Yahweh. According to Deuteronomy 20, the four acceptable reasons for exemption are: (1) having built a house as yet not dedicated; (2) having planted a vineyard the fruit of which had yet to

be enjoyed; (3) having married and not yet consummated the marriage; and (4) being fainthearted. In the parable only three reasons are given: (1) having bought a field not yet inspected; (2) having bought five yoke of oxen not yet examined, and (3) having recently married.¹⁵ Sanders argues that the parable closely follows the first three stipulations in Deuteronomy and is what might be expected in a midrash of this sort from its particular period. The important point is that the parable follows Deuteronomy 20.

Sanders goes on to say that in the War Scroll of the Dead Sea Scrolls, (I Q Mx 5-6), that only the fourth reason of Deuteronomy 20 occurs. Following Yigael Yadin,¹⁶ Sanders asserts that "faintheartedness" would only be determined when the army had come face to face with the enemy. The other exemptions were to be determined in Jerusalem before starting out. Sanders argues that by calling attention to the Holy War legislation of Deuteronomy 20, Jesus or Luke's Jesus, in excellent midrashic fashion, was saying that one must have Deuteronomy 20 in mind in order to understand the point of the parable.

Sanders goes on to argue that the Holy War legislation is eschatologized at Qumran. So is the messianic banquet in the Rule of the Congregation (IQSa). The banquet parable

¹⁵James A. Sanders, "The Ethic of Election in Luke's Great Banquet Parable," in Essays in Old Testament (New York: Ktav, 1974), 256.

¹⁶Ibid., 257.

speaks directly of the guest list of the Kingdom table in the Eschaton. In such a context, battle and banquet are to be seen in the same light.

Sanders also comments upon Luke's use of kaleo. He stresses that Luke only uses this word in chapter 14, 15 and 16:25 to signify election. In both the Great Banquet and Prodigal Son parable, kaleo has the ambiguity of meaning both "invite" and "elect." This serves to underscore what Sanders argues, that "the theme of the whole Central Section"¹⁷ is the subversion of the Deuteronomic ethic of election. Sanders writes,

Whereas Deuteronomy stressed that obedience brings blessings and disobedience curses, one cannot go on to assume (as many ever since Deuteronomy did assume---see the book of Job) that suffering indicates one is not elect while riches or ease on earth indicates that one is elect. It is my contention that every pericope in Luke's central section pursues this theme. But clearly the theme reaches a sort of climax in the parables of the Great Banquet, the Prodigal Son and the Rich Man and Lazarus.¹⁸

Luke's use of kaleo, meaning "to invite," in the context of dinners and banquets, allows him to stress his major point: "Those who are confident that they shall be at the eschatological banquet in all likelihood will not be."¹⁹ Following Larrimore Clyde Crockett, Sanders says the keklemenoi in Luke means "apparently elect" or "those who consider themselves

¹⁷Ibid., 258.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., 259.

elected."²⁰

Was Luke using the hermeneutic of prophetic critique or a constitutive hermeneutic? Sanders argues that Luke was using a hermeneutic of prophetic critique against a common inversion of the deuteronomic ethic of election. Using the methodology of comparative midrash, Sanders compares Luke's use of the Old Testament with the use of the Old Testament by the community at Qumran as seen in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Since Luke and the Scrolls come from approximately the same time, it is interesting to note that the Scrolls nowhere contain a challenge to the in-group. Every interpretation of the Old Testament is favorable to the sect. Every blessing is seen as flowing toward themselves in the End Time and every possible curse on their enemies. Sanders suggests they were a normal denomination.²¹ Even though early christianity may have followed just such in-group exegesis also, Sanders argues that Jesus employed a prophetic critique hermeneutics in what he said to his in-group Jewish contemporaries. This has led Sanders to warn against a static reading of the New Testament. To do so is to fall into anti-semiticism. Both Luke 14 and several passages in Qumran Cave 1 literature reflect upon the same Old Testament material and allow us to compare hermeneutics.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., 253.

The Rule of the Congregation specifically deals with those who may be admitted to the Qumran community and those who will sit at table when the Messiah comes. (I Q Sa ii 5-22). "The War Scroll establishes an index of those who are forbidden to approach the field of battle of the last great Holy War when the holy angels will fight on the side of the faithful against their enemies."²² Both lists are drawn from the category of the sons of Aaron in Leviticus 21:17-23, who are not allowed to approach the veil or altar. Both Leviticus and Qumran forbid the "maimed, blind and lame" of Luke 14.²³ Qumran clarified who should not approach the field of eschatological battle and who should not be present at the messianic table. According to Sanders, the Lukan list seems to reflect the levitical only as refracted through such legislation as that of Qumran, and it is used with the opposite intention. The Rule of the Congregation specifies those who are invited to the Community Council and to the Council when God will bring the Messiah for the messianic meal. (I Q Sa i 27-ii3), (I Q Sa ii 11-21).

Sanders suggests that Jesus used these passages from Qumran as foils for his teachings on humility and election. He completely inverted both the guest list and the seating arrangement. "One should assume neither where at the table

²²Ibid., 261.

²³Ibid., 262.

he should sit nor indeed that he will even have a place at the table. Luke makes it clear that Jesus is challenging the very identity of those who consider themselves keklemenoi. Like the classical prophets of the Old Testament Jesus precisely raises the question of the identity of Israel and challenges assumptions concerning election."²⁴ "I tell you, none of the keklemenoi shall taste my banquet" (Luke 14:24).

Sanders makes the additional point that the word for "poor" does not appear either in Leviticus 21 or in the two Qumran lists of those forbidden. That is because such words are used as self-designations of the sect or of Israel.²⁵ In the Old Testament Israel is challenged to always remember that she was a slave people and must always be conscious of the poor and powerless in order to continue to be God's people in the full sense of the meaning of the covenant people.²⁶ Jesus called his contemporaries to remember this basic truth. Sanders says,

It is for this reason that what is here proposed is an understanding of the parable, and of the teaching on humility as a prophetic critique of a common inversion of the Deuteronomic ethic of election. Deuteronomy may well say that God blesses the obedient and judges the disobedient. But it does not say that poverty and affliction and lack of bodily wholeness are proof of God's disfavor. On the contrary, these Lukan constructions

²⁴Ibid., 264.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., 265.

appear to insist on a common Old Testament theme that God has a kind of bias for those in apparent disfavor.²⁷

Sanders concedes this dual theme of the Old Testament, i.e. its call for purity (Leviticus 21) and its call for care of the poor and dispossessed. (Deuteronomy 14:29; 16:11-14; 26:11ff). To do so is to recognize the historical principle of the ambiguity of reality.

How do we read this text honestly? God's grace is extended to the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. That God's election can extend to the imperfect, the broken, the weak, the helpless, and the poor is a profound message of good news. We must never forget that this is our true identity. We live by God's unmerited favor. Knowing this truth, we are invited to give to others what we have received. The truly elect are those who care for the needy and extend a welcome to them as they sit together at table fellowship. The truly elect are those who know their humility and do not look to their own interests apart from the interests of others. The truly elect are those who have the mind of Christ; who humble themselves and become servants to a needy world.

What does it mean to read the text with humility? In this text, humility requires that we identify with those who appear to be God's elect, but who prove not to be by their

²⁷Ibid.

refusal to accept God's invitation to the messianic feast. It means to see our face in the faces of the arrogant and self-righteous. In doing so, we experience the judgment of God. To do so is to open ourselves to the possibility of God's transforming love. In seeing our lack of humility, we may be driven to repentance and new life. When that has occurred, we may begin to see that we are really the poor, maimed, blind, and lame who have miraculously been included by God at His table.

Where is the humor in this text? We all must laugh at our self-seeking and ladder climbing. It is humorous and pathetic for us to play "king of the mountain" only to discover that those at the bottom of the pile are the true winners. That hurts so bad that the shock of it ought to re-focus our lives from ourselves toward the God who constantly turns our pathetic games upside down.

What does this text contribute to our church's self-understanding and mission in the world? This text puts us in touch with God's judging grace. It calls into question the identity of both church and culture. In this text, we are called to repentance and humility. Rather than the church providing a support or justification for the divisions within our culture created by our social, political, and economic systems, this text calls the church to repentance and to a

new understanding of its gospel. In this text we are called to a new humility about ourselves and others. Clearly, the mind of Christ, of which Paul speaks in Philippians 2, is revealed in this text. It is those who join in his humility and who learn to serve, who will be at table on the last day with Him.

Church Context

Ours is a community made up of those who have made it to the top of the political and economic mountain in America. Whether we know it or not, we are the powerful and wealthy. Therefore, we tend to view ourselves as being special in the deities eyes. We surely judge the poor and imperfect as on the social ladder beneath us. One might say that Orange County has been the promised land for the American "right wing" political visionaries. Here the dream of a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant America has been maintained. Much of the conservative money and political leadership of our country has been spawned here. Our church has members in it who believe that whatever is good for big business is good for America. Even though our church's identity has been weak, the political and social convictions of our people are strong. To hear that the powerful, "kings of the mountains," while appearing to be God's elect, may not be so, is indeed troubling. For this reason, I knew this sermon would be most difficult to deliver. I read the manuscript, not wanting to stray from a single word. The

manuscript has been refined since its preaching, but the essential thrust of the sermon is the same. Even though, in the eyes of the world, we may appear to be God's darlings, appearances may be deceiving. The truly elect are those who accept God's invitation to join in table fellowship with rich and poor, black and white, male and female, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, in one new humanity reconciled by the grace of God. Those who refuse to join Jesus upon His way to Jerusalem, especially if they are the powerful and think themselves God's elect people, may be sorely surprised to discover themselves excluded from the final party of God's elect.

Sermon: "Appearances Are Deceiving"

When I was a young boy of twelve or thirteen, I lived on a block that was filled with children my age. Summertime was a special delight, in that there were many daylight hours in which to play. We were a rowdy bunch. Some of our games were highly competitive and destructive. One of the games we played was "King of the Mountain." The object was to form a pile of human bodies and see who could fight his way to the top and stay there. There were many bruises and scratches that we inflicted on each other, and the fellow who made it to the top, and stayed there the longest, enjoyed great prestige until the next time we played.

Little did I realize that the game we played was a model of what life can be like. From an early age we have it bred into us, that the object of life is to get as close to the top as possible. The top in our society is recognized in several different ways. We call the process of moving up, upward mobility. We know we have arrived when we are near the centers of power that have meaning for us. The road toward the top leads us through educational institutions like the University of Southern California and the University of California at Los Angeles. To be a graduate of one of those schools is to clothe oneself in the aura of power. I have had many a young person tell me that their association with the University of Southern California or a certain fraternity or sorority helped open doors for friendships and jobs that would have been impossible without these credentials.

The road leads to vocational choices that hopefully are lucrative. In our society, money is power. If one has a prestigious vocation that pays handsomely, then one can buy the symbols of success and power. The house comes; a better neighborhood; a German sportscar; a boat; a mountain cabin; a vacation to Europe; a recognized face on Mainstreet; membership in the right clubs; a beautiful wife and family.

The goal is to get to the top of the mountain using all your energy, intelligence, and imagination. This is the Americans way, the American dream. I never shall forget Richard Nixon describing how hard he, as a poor boy from

Southern California had worked to make it to the top, to achieve the American dream, to become President of the United States. To one degree or another, we have all participated in that dream. We have trained ourselves in the best schools, associated ourselves with the right people, married the most beautiful that we could win, joined the best firms, worked endless hours, and finally made it to the top here in Laguna Beach. I understand the journey because I have been on it---scratching, clawing, kicking, screaming, working, trying to get the most out of life I thought possible. Most of my friends in the ministry look at me and humorously suggest that I've made it. My parents rejoice, and from time to time, people ask enviously, "how did you manage to get to Laguna Beach?" Sometimes I feel like saying, "because I worked harder than you. I'm more gifted than you. God loves me more than you. My education is superior," and on and on.

When you've finally arrived in your dream city, in your dream house, with your dream family, with plenty of money, safely behind the greenbelt or the guarded entrance to your community, you tend to feel that you have what you deserve, and anyone who is not at the top with you, is not of the same caliber as yourself. It's difficult to be humble when you're at the top. In reading Jeb Stuart Magruder's, An American Life, One Man's Road to Watergate²⁸ I found myself reading

²⁸Jeb Stuart Magruder, An American Life, One Man's Road to Watergate (New York: Atheneum, 1974)

your story and mine. It is the story of a young man using all his talents to rise from obscurity to a close association with the President of the United States. It's the story of an American boy who learned how to play king of the mountain pretty well, and who was willing to lie and steal, to misuse his power, to stay at the top. It's difficult to be humble when you're at the top, whether in business, politics or religion.

Jesus found himself at a dinner party with a group of people like us. He observed how they chose the places of honor at the table. It came so natural for them. Without second thought, they gravitated toward the center of power, toward the head table. Much to the embarrassment of his host, he commented on their lack of humility and power seeking. He could see that their position in society had lead them to believe that they were special. They believed their wealth, political power, religious authority and standing in their community were signs that God had elected them to be his special people. In seeing this, Jesus realised that they had misread their scriptures. They had rationalized their good fortune, and interpreted it to mean that they were God's righteous, elect people.

Jesus told them a story that turned their worldview upside down. What he told them was that things are not always as they seem. Those who appear to have all the symbols

of God's blessings and who live at the top, politically, socially, economically, or religiously may not be God's elect. Appearances may be deceiving. "The truth is," Jesus said, "God has a special predisposition toward the poor and powerless, toward those who have no standing in human culture." As a matter of fact, on the last day, when God's messiah joins God's people for His final victory feast, the people who will gather around that table will not be the "kings of the mountains," the best competitors, the white, anglo-saxon protestants, with the fruits of their work ethic exhibited for all to see. Rather, the people who come to that party will be those who least expected to receive an invitation.

I see some of the people at the table. There's the black family that lives in the canyon and is supported by welfare. There's a group of the bums who live at the beach, who never shower or cut their hair, who come asking for hand outs at our church office. There's a few of the boys from "The Little Shrimp" restaurant who never were able to straighten out their sexual identities to the good peoples' liking. There's some illegal aliens, wetbacks as we call them, some of the fellows who work at the car wash or who pick tomatoes in Irvine's fields, around that table. Yes, there are even a few poor blacks and Latinos from Santa Ana and other Orange County ghettos. There's some Asian refugees that we tried to forget because they remind us of a national nightmare and failure. And there's some people who discovered in the midst of their

success and power, that dreams can be shattered, that a house of cards can tumble down, that it's possible to fall from the top, in crushing agony and despair. On and on the list grows. People from east and west, and north and south eating at the same table with their Savior and Lord, all thankful for the grace of the one who invited them, when they least expected it.

Jesus reminds us that we have our chance to be included. As good Presbyterians, we receive our invitation to join Him at the messianic banquet. But He is not what we expect as the messiah. So we wrap ourselves in pious excuses, we R.S.V.P., and cite chapter and verse our reasons for not attending. If there were good reasons for being excused from holy war, as listed in Deuteronomy 20, then surely these are excuses that we can use. In sending our regrets, the ones "at the top," the "kings of the mountains," the ones who "have it made" in the eyes of the world, miss out. Those at the bottom of the pile prove to be the truly elect, even as ancient Israel, a slave people, a weak people, a poor people, became the people chosen by the Lord to bless the world. Appearances can be deceiving. It is the humble who inherit the kingdom and not the proud. Our world has it all wrong, and Jesus came to set us right.

In preaching to the Brick Presbyterian Church in Rochester, New York in 1964, just after the summer race riots

had shocked "the ones at the top," the "kings of the mountain," "the prominent citizens of that city," "the good presbyterians," James Sanders said,

There is always a place at God's table and in His kingdom for the dispossessed, for him who can say, "I am undeserving of an invitation, I can make no claim on Him, I am unworthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under that table, and my name does not appear on the list of the pure and undefiled." It is to the person who knows the judgment of God in his life and who knows he cannot so much as measure up to God's humility in Christ, much less his majesty, that salvation and redemption come. In other words not until we modern Essenes and Pharisees, we Presbyterians and Baptists, cease to view the dispossessed as riffraff but rather as our brothers in the kingdom of God, not until we know that we, like them, can make no claim on God will we have experienced the judgment of the Gospel which redeems and saves. Not until Jesus offends us by his rabble-rousing teaching and we admit that if we had been there we, like the Pharisees and Essenes would have jailed him and tried him and crucified him can we be transformed, redeemed, and saved. When the dispossessed have ceased to be "they" and "them" and have become "we" and "us," when we realize that we, like them, have no claim to make, no status to defend, and no place of honor to boast, then shall we know the power of the good news that still, there is room.²⁹

Appearances are deceiving. God's truth is reality. Reality may be shocking and scandalous to us, but it may also be healing. May it be so for us. For a church that has been healed by God's judgment and grace is a church filled with joy. It is a church set free to live within and beyond its culture. It is a church that can become a place of healing and reconciliation. And it is a church that is this world's best hope.

²⁹James A. Sanders, God Has A Story Too (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 89.

May God give to us all the grace to find ourselves humbly
at His table. Amen.

Sermon: "Renunciation for Christ"
Luke 14:25-35
Hebrews 11:23-28
Deuteronomy 18:15-19, 20:10-18
November 16, 1980

Hermeneutical Questions

What is God doing in this situation? The theme of discipleship is addressed throughout the central section of Luke's gospel. Therefore, this seemed a good opportunity to address the subject. See Luke 9:57-62; 18:24-30. In the previous pericope, those who least expected it received an invitation to the banquet. It was as if all they had to do was accept the invitation and come. God's grace was extended to the poor and imperfect. The ones who came to the banquet were soon to learn that God's grace is not cheap. To fellowship with the messiah and his elect people is also to share his mission. To accompany the messiah, to travel with him, is to understand that his destiny is Jerusalem. The multitudes may go with him, but they must be warned that following Christ is costly. Christian discipleship means renunciation of all that one possesses for the sake of Christ. It means that he comes before any family relationship. It means becoming identified with His death by carrying a cross and being willing to suffer with Him along the way---if necessary. It means counting the cost like a man does before he builds a tower, to determine if he has enough to complete the task. It

means evaluating the outcome of one's decisions like a king going forth to war. If he cannot win, he seeks a negotiated peace. In effect, following Christ means dying to one's self and establishing Christ at the center of his existence. As Bonhoeffer said, "When Christ calls a man He bids him come and die."³⁰

The total demand of God's kingdom is at the center of this text. The costly grace of God is seen throughout Deuteronomy in its insistence that no other gods may be worshipped in Israel. The kingdom of Christ requires total loyalty and obedience. Like ancient Israel on its way to the promised land, so the church is on its way to Jerusalem with her Lord, and that way demands one's total commitment.

With whom do we identify in this text? We are part of the great multitude who follow Jesus: We are the ones asked to see ourselves in the builder and the king. We are the salt that is called to preserve and enhance the world by our total loyalty to Christ's kingdom. We are the ones who must know that following Christ demands our all and may cost our lives. We are the ones who must renounce all that we have for the sake of Christ. These words of Christ penetrate our easy discipleship and self-seeking. These words cause us

³⁰Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (New Macmillan, 1979), 7.

to struggle with whether or not we want to follow him.

How was Luke representing Deuteronomy and thereby adapting the older tradition to his situation? In Deuteronomy 20, instructions for holy war are contained. As God's army approached distant cities to be fought against, terms of peace were to be offered. If they made peace, then all the people captured were to be enslaved. If they did not make peace, then the males were to be killed and everyone else and everything else taken as booty. Clearly, a wise king would count the cost of doing battle with the army of God. The cities of the land's inhabitants, i.e., the cities of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites were to be totally destroyed. Why? In order to eliminate the threat of idolatry in the promised land.

In resignifying Deuteronomy 20, Luke's Jesus was theologizing. He was saying that God's kingdom demands total obedience. The relationships and possessions which lay claim to us must be subordinated to God's will. In a deeper sense, I believe he was suggesting to the reader that Christ's journey to Jerusalem was like a holy war in which the principalities and powers of this world were being subjugated to the kingdom of God. If one was to be a part of such an invading army, total renunciation of any conflicting loyalty was to be made.

It was for this reason that Luke presented Jesus as

a "prophet like Moses" in the central section. Like Moses, Jesus had renounced all earthly loyalties to do God's will. So must we if we are to be Christ's disciples and follow him to Jerusalem.

Was Luke using the hermeneutic of prophetic critique or a constitutive hermeneutic? Unless one renounces all that he has he cannot be one of God's elect. This is the hermeneutic of prophetic critique. Election is not unto blessing alone but unto obedience and responsibility also. The blessings are for the faithful and obedient. However, one cannot conclude that wealth and health are signs of election. The elect are those who are willing to bear a cross, to forsake all, to renounce possessions for the sake of going with Christ. Election is unto obedient service and suffering. If one is not willing to lay down his life, he cannot be Christ's disciple. This is no easy doctrine of election. This is a call to radical discipleship. It calls into question our identity as the people of God.

How do we read this text honestly? The text presupposes the grace of God, but emphasizes the freedom of God. God's grace accepts the poor, the blind, the maimed, and the lame, but does not leave them there. Even for this group, there is a call to radical discipleship. Regardless of who follows, rich or poor, healthy or broken, the call to obedience is the

same. This text moves quickly to the question, "What ought we to do in response to the grace of God?" The answer: "renounce all" in gratitude for God's grace revealed in Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to read the text with humility?

Each time we read this text we must feel its sting. Jesus' call to radical obedience leaves us humbled and aware of the many gods which we still serve. His call brings us to our knees seeking forgiveness for our reservations and efforts to make his grace cheap. As the church, we cannot say this teaching is for someone else. No! This message calls us to repentance.

Where is the humor in this text? The call is so cutting and we are exposed in our idolatry with such intensity, that we are driven to take God far more seriously than we might have. Honesty allows us to laugh at our half-hearted discipleship. If we could not laugh, we would die of despair. Our laughter allows us to repent and to trust the grace of the one who invites us into his fellowship, not because of our perfection, but because of his love.

What does this text contribute to our church's self-understanding and mission in the world? There is no easy discipleship. Casual religion or selfish, success oriented pseudo-christianity is not discipleship to Christ. Our

mission is to call those who follow Christ to count the cost, to establish Christ and God's kingdom at the center of life. We have made God's grace cheap and the church must repent. The church is to be salt. If we have ears to hear, then we must hear this life changing challenge.

Church Context

Our church needed to hear this call to radical discipleship. Like many congregations, we have pursued an easy christianity. Our surrounding culture dictates a relaxed, layed-back approach to life. When people come to Laguna Beach they come to vacation and to enjoy the pleasurable things in life. The surf and the sand are gods that can determine our lifestyle. Our materialism builds barriers between us and Christ. So many in our community want their religion to be entertaining and supportive of the life styles they have chosen. Jesus' call to renunciation and cost counting no doubt cleaned out the ranks of those following him. I know for sure that my sermon motivated some of those on the fringes to go hear a popular, humorous, lighter preacher in Newport Beach.

This has been painful for me and has helped me to understand the cost of biblical preaching. One lady actually asked during this series on Luke to have her child baptized on a Sunday when the sermon text would be lighter. The temptation for the preacher is to cave in to the culture, to eliminate

sermons on costly discipleship, to give people what they want in order to win them to the church. What I am learning to renounce in myself is the need to succeed at the gospel's expense. I submit the following sermon as evidence of my own cross bearing.

Sermon: "Renunciation For Christ"

When we were in the middle east last June, I saw for the first time with my own eyes the ancient symbols of Egypt's glorious past. The pyramids, the tombs of kings, the gold, the precious stones, the fine works of art, remind us of ancient Egypt's wealth and political power. I thought of Moses. Moses the Hebrew, raised in pharaoh's court, educated in the philosophy and wisdom of Egypt, heir of a great fortune, the beloved, adopted son of pharaoh's daughter. As a young man, Egypt offered him everything, beautiful women, wealth, prestige, and power. Yet Moses was a Hebrew and knew it. His people were slaves, but he had been spared. His people were poor and segregated, while he lived in ease at pharaoh's court. His people were regarded as threats to Egypt's internal security, while he was accepted. His people were the victims of genocide, while he was secure.

We need to read between the lines as we study Moses' life. His internal conflict must have been great. Was he a Hebrew or an Egyptian? Hebrew blood ran in his veins, but politically he was an Egyptian who marveled at and enjoyed

the glory of his native land. With whom would he cast his lot in this racist, oppressive society? Would he seek to save his own skin, blot out his racial background, and deaden his conscience? Would he celebrate the power and wealth of Egypt and praise the Sun god. Or would he affirm his Jewish race and tradition? Would he take upon himself the sign of his people, become poor like them, and live out his days as a slave? Would he seek to use his power to liberate his people?

The Bible tells us it took Moses a long time to decide, but he did decide. The book of Hebrews says of him,

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt for he looked to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

From the perspective of faith it is possible to reinterpret parts of the book of Exodus to show the general thrust of Moses' life. What happened to Moses under the impact of traumatic events, a guilty conscience, and revelation? He renounced his Egyptian citizenship. He renounced his adopted family. He renounced the wealth and glory of Egypt. He renounced his Egyptian hopes and took upon himself the identity of the Hebrews. Their poverty became his. Their journey of faith was his. Their struggles became his burdens. Their God became his God.

In speaking of Moses' renunciation, one must speak

also of the "prophet like Moses" of whom the New Testament speaks.

Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of man. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Philipians 2:5-8

The prophet of whom Paul wrote was Jesus the Son of God. Like Moses, Jesus learned the meaning of renunciation in pursuing his destiny as savior of the world. He was on his way to Jerusalem. He knew what awaited him in Jerusalem. To make that journey Jesus bid farewell to all whom he loved. To those who followed him he spoke with complete candor. He challenged them, "Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

Jesus, like Moses, had learned the necessity of saying farewell to this life in order to live with abandon, in order to do God's will, and so they instruct us. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to renounce all competing loyalties for the sake of Christ. It is to place Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God before family, self, wealth, and nation. To do this, we count the cost. Loyalty to the will of God cost Moses and Jesus everything, but in renouncing all, they found life and love. Jesus said to his disciples later on,

Truly, I say to you, there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive manifold more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.

To follow Jesus to Jerusalem is to say farewell to all those persons and things which might hold us back. Discipleship is a costly business.

This morning I want to speak of one dimension of our lives which I believe must be renounced if we are to follow Jesus Christ in Laguna Beach and Orange County. I am speaking of our infatuation with "spectatorship." More and more the theater, the sports stadium, the television room have determined our life style. Are we becoming a nation of spectators? We go to events. We pay our admission. We observe the performance. We do not know those whom we observe. We root for our team to win. We applaud the winners. We boo the quarterback who does not move his team. We pass judgment on the director or coach. We sit in the critics corner wanting to be entertained, needing to be identified with a winner, angry if we are not. We have a spectator mentality and we carry this attitude with us into the church. If we are to be Christian disciples, this spectator mentality must be renounced. But it will cost us to renounce it.

First, to renounce our spectatorship it will cost us more than the average price of admission to the theater or sports stadium. Christian discipleship is going to cost us a sizeable portion of what we have. For the Christian to follow Christ he or she will have to be freed up in regard to his/her possessions. If Christ and his church do not receive

a far higher percentage of the average income then we will become the laughing stock of our community. We will be like the one who started to build without counting the cost, then discovered it was too expensive to complete the project. As uncomfortable as it is to speak of money, if I am to be honest with those on the way to Jerusalem with me, I must inform you that Christian discipleship will cost us all more than we expected. A casual spectatorship that buys a ticket for entrance, even though it be the best seat in the house, will not do. Christ calls us to the total commitment of all our resources as we journey with him.

Secondly, to renounce our spectatorship, it will cost us our anonymity. I have observed in the sports stadium a lack of community. It's a lonely crowd in the stadium seeking a common bond by identification with a school or team. Being in the stadium does not require much commitment. You do not have to know anyone else. You rub elbows. You are surrounded by strangers and you go away as lonely as you came.

This spectator style has infected our society and our church. How often do we come to church not wanting to really be known. So we go away as lonely as we came. We fear the loss of anonymity. The Gallup Poll finds that as many as ever believe in God and Christ. They believe the Bible is the word of God, yet they want their religion ala carte, without commitment to the church, without community. What many want is religion with anonymity. Dearly beloved, in renouncing

our spectatorship, it will cost us our anonymity. "Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

Lastly, to renounce our spectatorship it will cost us our observer status. We go to the theater or the stadium to see a performance. The actors are on the stage and we applaud them. The players are on the field and we cheer for them. They are the participants, we the observers.

We carry this into the church. The pastors are the players and actors and you come here to urge us on. You support us so we can do the ministry. You affirm us when we have been entertaining. You critique us when we fumble the ball or give a poor performance. This observer status must be renounced if we are to be Christ's disciples. The acting; the playing; the ministry belongs to the whole people of God. A contagious church is one that affirms the ministry of the laity and joins with its pastors and staff in faithful, committed discipleship.

To renounce all that we have for Christ will require us to renounce our spectatorship. To do so, it will cost us more than the price of an admission ticket for the Sunday morning performance. It will cost us our anonymity. It will cost us our observer status. But the rewards will be the excitement of the journey and the knowledge we have that we are going with Christ, "the prophet like Moses," toward the city of God.

Sermon: "The God Who Seeks"
Luke 15:1-10
Deuteronomy 22:1-4
November 30, 1980

Hermeneutical Questions

What is God doing in this situation? The Pharisees objected to Jesus' openness to those they had defined as sinners. Their criticism was this, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." It is interesting to note Luke's interest in table fellowship in the Gospel and the Acts. So Jesus told a parable to them about a flock of sheep and a shepherd. The parable was addressed as a question: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it?" Having found it, he came home rejoicing. When he arrived home, he invited all his friends and neighbors to rejoice with him, over the found sheep. Jesus' concluding remarks were, "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

Jesus was seeking to teach the "elect ones" about God's grace. God is a seeking God. God seeks the lost, the sinners. God rejoices when one lost person is found and reconciled. In fact, Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. This was his primary agenda and so it must be the number one

priority of the church. To be elect is to share God's concern over the lost and his joy at the lost being found. But for the Pharisees, God's grace must have appeared as a form of divine injustice. The central thrust of the parable is thus a call to rejoicing over the lost ones being found.

With whom do we identify in this text? We may identify with the ninety-nine sheep or with the one lost sheep. The Pharisees no doubt identified with the ninety-nine sheep left in the wilderness by the shepherd as he sought the one lost sheep. To them, God's grace must have appeared as a form of divine injustice. Surely God would not leave good people alone in the wilderness to seek a bad person? Jesus' parable suggests that God would do just that. Therefore, Jesus teaches that the truly elect are those who can be left alone and yet rejoice when the lost one is found. To be able to rejoice when the lost is found, even though you've been abandoned on the hillside is to truly understand how great God's grace is. As members of the religious establishment we are challenged to understand how great God's grace is. God's grace embraces us, but also it reaches out beyond us to include those whom we would classify as unworthy of God's love.

Too often we identify with the one lost sheep and fail to hear the prophetic critique. However, in a profound sense, we are the lost ones. Blessed are those who know they are lost and need the seeking love of God. The tragedy of the Pharisees

was that they did not know their need for the grace of God. Their self-righteousness had blinded them to their need. This parable compells us to face our lostness whether we are with the ninety-nine in the wilderness or are the one lost sheep. We are all lost and cannot find ourselves until we are found by God's grace.

How was Luke re-presenting Deuteronomy and thereby adapting the older tradition to his situation? Deuteronomy 22:1-4 contains an admonition concerning all things that may be lost. Such things as "your brothers ox, sheep, ass, or garment," are included. Each person had the responsibility of seeking, finding, and returning whatever was lost to one's brother. "So you shall do with any lost thing of your brothers, which he loses and you find; you may not withhold your help." Deuteronomy 22:3. A brother is any Israelite who needs help.

Jesus' parable reinforced this deuteronomic law of brotherly love. The Pharisees had excluded the tax collectors and sinners from Israel so they felt no requirement to reach out to them and help. Jesus called them to accountability. If a brother's possessions were lost, brotherly love required help and restoration, if at all possible. Jesus expanded the Pharisees' understanding of brotherhood and the legal obligations inherent in that relationship. With this, they must have had reason to recall the lostness of ancient Israel's slavery in Egypt and how God sought and found them. The point was

that the command of brotherly love is rooted in the nature of God's relationship with his people. His elect people are those who have been found by the grace of God.

Was Luke using the hermeneutic of prophetic critique or a constitutive hermeneutic? Both! In this parable we see the freedom of the God of grace. Until people can accept their lostness and know they have been found by God, they cannot celebrate when other lost ones are found. This was the Pharisees' spiritual condition. If they were God's elect, they would have celebrated the fact that Jesus received sinners and ate with them. He was proving himself to be the faithful brother. In seeking the lost he was fulfilling the law. In criticizing Jesus, the Pharisees showed their lack of brotherly love. Therefore, their election was called into question by their lack of love. The grace of God is strongly presented in the parable. The good news is that God seeks the lost, the weak, the helpless, the sinners.

How do we read this text honestly? God's grace is the theme of this parable. Irresponsible, straying, lost sheep are the objects of God's love. That is the message of the Bible. God's grace works in and through human sinfulness. The Pharisees, who are custodians of the Bible, do not seem to know this. They are tragic figures because of this. This text causes us to deal honestly with ourselves as the custodians of the Bible today, as those who claim to be God's elect people. Do we

still know the message of the Bible that God loves and seeks the lost? Are we offended by the message that Christ's seeking moves beyond us to people that we may despise and identify as sinners. If we murmur at the company Christ keeps, can we really be his disciples? Honesty requires that we answer these questions.

What does it mean to read the text with humility? In the past I had always identified with the lost sheep found by the good shepherd. It is legitimate to do so. But the text requires that I also identify with the ninety-nine sheep left in the wilderness. To do so is to understand why the Pharisees were offended by Jesus. They are our dynamic equivalents. In identifying with the bad guys, we begin to see how radical God's grace really is.

Where is the humor in this text? The humor is in the contrast between heaven and the representatives of heaven on earth. Heaven rejoices when the lost are found. The so-called "representatives of heaven" stand pouting on the sidelines. More often we find ourselves sulking with the Pharisees than rejoicing with God. In seeing this we must laugh at ourselves and begin to take heaven a little more seriously.

What does this text contribute to our church's self-understanding and mission in the world? It ought to help us see what God's concerns are. God is seeking the lost and so

must we. This scripture will not support a self-righteous, separatist church. We are a church of sinners who dare never forget that we live by God's grace. Like the good shepherd, our task is to risk the church in seeking the lost.

Church Context

This sermon was preached on the first Sunday of Advent. During advent we seek to prepare our people for the celebration of Christmas. At Christmas we rejoice because God sent his son to seek and to save the lost. Rather than preach prophetically to our people, I decided to emphasize the grace of God in seeking the lost. It is this truth that is the central affirmation of Christmas and I did not want to miss this opportunity to preach the gospel. However, it gave me an opportunity to reflect on the Pharisees lack of joy and to suggest that our lack of joy may indeed be a misunderstanding of how great God's grace can be.

Sermon: "The God Who Seeks"

The spirit of Christmas is joy. On that Christmas eve so long ago the angel announced to the shepherds, "Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David, a savior, who is Christ the Lord." Yes, Jesus the Christ came into our world at Christmas time to seek us out, to fill us

with the joy of salvation.

But even as we consider the joy of this season, we are reminded that life is joyless for many. Many have not experienced the joy of the angel's announcement. Many live in a darkness unpenetrated by the light of Christ. Many have become lost to the good news of Christmas. Even with this, we know that each Christmas many are found by the God who seeks them in the midst of this joyous season.

Luke's Gospel gives us insight into the Christmas message. Not only does he tell us the story of the birth of Christ, but he also illustrates the central truth of Christmas, that our God is a seeking God. His will is to find those who have become lost. In the 15th chapter, Luke shares with us three of Jesus' parables about animals, things, and persons who have become lost but are sought by their owners. In each case the lost ones are found, and in being found, become the source of great joy for those who have found them. This reminds us that God seeks the lost and heaven rejoices when he finds those who have been lost.

It may sound strange, but it's true: you cannot live inside the joy of Christmas until you've discovered what it means to be lost and then to be found by the seeking God. This was the difficulty the Pharisees had. As far as they were concerned, they had never been lost. To be sure, their tradition spoke of Israel being lost in Egyptian slavery and

found by the "seeking God" who delivered them. But the Pharisees had forgotten. They had lost the joy of their people's salvation. They considered themselves to be so much a part of the "in-crowd" that they now found it almost impossible to identify with lost sheep. When you consider yourself as righteous; when you have power and wealth; when you're unaware of your sin; you have difficulty in placing yourself in the shoes of that person or group or thing or animal that is lost. So when Jesus came seeking the lost, welcoming tax collectors, "communists," and eating with known sinners, "homosexuals," the Pharisees were offended. They had become a joyless people. They had lost the good news of their tradition. They no longer lived within the tension of lostness and foundness, and as a result, they had lost their joy. As heaven rejoiced, the religious ones frowned and pouted.

Lest we feel ourselves immune, let us remember that it is possible to move through this Christmas season with sadness rather than joy. If we no longer rejoice in wandering sheep being found, then we are suffering from the pharisaical dilemma. Once again we need to discover the true joy of our salvation that God loves those we cannot love. In the words of Peter, "whoever lacks these things is blind and shortsighted and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins."

Perhaps we need to appreciate once again what it's like to be lost and the many ways one can drift away from the flock.

To begin with, you may be lost to God and others and not even know it. In last Sunday's Calendar section of the Los Angeles Times,³¹ the front page featured an interview with Bob Dylan, the rock music artist, whose conversion to Jesus Christ has rocked the music industry. He said,

The funny thing is alot of people think that Jesus comes into a person's life only when he is either down and out or miserable, or old and withering away. That's not the way it was for me. I was doing fine. I had come a long way in the year we had been on the road in 1978. I was relatively content. I did not know I was lost. But a very close friend of mine mentioned a couple of things to me and one of them was Jesus. Well, the whole idea of Jesus was foreign to me. I said to myself, I can't deal with that.

Later through a friend, Dylan met two young pastors. He reported,

I was kind of skeptical, but I was also open. I certainly wasn't cynical. I asked lots of questions like, "What's this Son of God business? What's all that mean? What does it mean---dying for my sins?"

Slowly Dylan began to accept the fact that Jesus was for real and that he wasn't going to come into his life and make him miserable. Sometime in 1978, Dylan had a vision and felt a presence in his room and he knew it was God. He concluded that Jesus was seeking him and that he was lost without Christ. In that moment, he found a new joy as he let himself be found. This joy has given him a new song. Like Bob Dylan, you may be here this morning and be lost, not even knowing it, but the good news is this: "God is seeking you."

³¹Los Angeles Times (November 23, 1980) Calendar Section.

We can slowly, almost unknowingly become lost. Like a sheep looking for greener pastures we can become separated from the flock and be lost to the shepherd. Or, like the old man in Hemingway's classic The Old Man and The Sea, we may slowly drift from safety into the lostness of the vast ocean seeking something that will prove we are "something" or "someone." How many of us have felt the cultural imperative to rise to the occasion and prove ourselves once again to be men. In seeking to prove himself a man, Hemingway's old man sought the great fish that would feed him and give him self-pride. As it happened, he caught the fish and it pulled him into danger at sea. When he at long last returned to Havana Harbor, the great fish had been eaten by sharks and he was nearly dead himself. In seeking greener pastures, in wandering from safe waters, in seeking to satisfy his own ego, he was pulled in to deeper, more dangerous waters and he almost lost everything.

In the wayward sheep and the old man I see a parable of life. Not a day goes by that I do not see people looking for greener pastures or the promising deeper waters which offer the abundant life. There's another woman or man who promises to bring greater happiness. So we begin to move toward the realization of that seductive fantasy and become lost to faithful relationships. Or there's another job or business that promises

³²Ernest Hemingway, The Old Man and The Sea (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952).

much. We move toward it. It demands our all. We work hard. Our long hours alienate us from our families and we become lost to loved ones. Or there's a new high to be experienced. If you take the right pill or smoke the right weed, you can find greater fulfillment. The drifting begins toward drug dependency pill by pill, weed by weed, bottle by bottle, snift by snift, shot by shot, until you're hooked.

But there's a more common way of drifting away from God and loved ones. Sleep in on Sundays, walk the beach and relax from the pressures of the week. Surely that is the way to find oneself, rather than a way to become lost. But what happens? You stop worshipping God, maybe not all at once, but intermittently, Sunday by Sunday, month by month, year by year, and suddenly you're lost to Christ and the church. Yes, we can become lost, slowly, almost unknowingly, like a sheep seeking greener pastures, like an old man searching for survival and self-esteem.

We can become lost by accident, as well as by drifting away. Like the woman's precious silver coins, one may be misplaced, dropped on the floor and lost accidentally in the circumstances of life. Today we think of 52 hostages in Iran---lost to their families on this holiday weekend---not because of their wrong doing, but lost in the crunch of political change. We think of those who have been victimized by life---through economic changes, through disease or death. We remember those who are now alone, unloved, lost through accident.

Thank God, the parable does not end with the sheep being lost or with the woman's silver coins being lost, or with the father's son being willfully lost in a far country. The 15th chapter of Luke tells us good news. There's a shepherd who knows we've wandered from the flock and he is seeking us. There's a presence that sails the deeper waters looking for us. There's a woman who sweeps the house and seeks diligently for her precious possessions. There's a father who waits patiently for the lost to be found. Who is this shepherd? Who is this presence upon the deep waters? Who is this presence who, in the imagery of C. S. Lewis, walks beside us through dark, foggy mountain passes, making himself felt, finally speaking to us directly as he sees us home safely? Who is this woman who diligently seeks the lost? It's God! It's the Christ of Christmas. This is the meaning of Christmas. God came into this lost world seeking to reconcile it to himself and restore its lost joy. The message of our text is that God seeks the lost and causes his whole creation to rejoice. How tragic that some of us forget the agony of lostness and lose compassion. How tragic that some can actually be critical of any who truly seek the lost.

The parable tells us that the shepherd found his lost sheep, laid it upon his shoulders rejoicing, and when he came home, he called his friends together for a joyful party. "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." And

the woman upon finding her coins, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost." And the father, upon the return of his lost son, "Let us eat and make merry, for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

May I suggest that joy is the theme of the Christmas season. Joy that there is one who seeks us and upon finding us stimulates a celebration in heaven. Let us never forget that we have been lost but are now found. Let us never lose our sensitivity for the lost. May we never lose the joy of our salvation. Perhaps it is the loss of joy that the Savior will help us rediscover this Christmas time. Sometimes God's grace may appear to be a form of divine injustice, but let us never forget this truth: Our God seeks the lost; God has found us; and his seeking of other lost ones ought to set off a celebration in our midst each time one is found.

Sermon: "The Business of Christmas"
Luke 16:19-31
Deuteronomy 24:6-22
December 21, 1980

Hermeneutical Questions

What is God doing in this situation? God has spoken his word through Moses and the prophets. If people refuse to hear, to believe, and to obey God's word, then no miracle will convince them. The Pharisees had wrongly concluded that their wealth was a sign of their election. They were lovers of money and not of people. If a person were poor and ill, they concluded that his/her poverty and sickness were a sign of God's disfavor and a punishment for sin. They were able to justify their lack of love by their distorted reading of Deuteronomy. In failing to show mercy to the poor they had actually violated the law in Deuteronomy that called for justice and mercy to be extended to the poor of Israel.

Jesus told this story as a warning. He calls us who are religious and wealthy to repentance for our neglect of the poor. He illustrates, as Luke's Jesus is so prone to do, that God has a special love for the poor, the sick, and the oppressed. We are warned not to trust our riches for salvation. The text informs us that our lifestyle in this world may indeed be reversed in the next life if we fail to show mercy to the poor who lie at the steps of our houses and cities. This story in Luke stands as a judgment and warning to all of us rich

Christians who live in a hungry world. We dare not praise God for our election and material blessings and fail to serve the needy. Election may mean bearing a cross that leads us to suffering and death seeking to right our world's wrongs.

With whom do we identify in this text? We must identify with the rich man. He is our dynamic equivalent. As we identify with him, we hear the power of this story. We are the rich and we often have blinders on that prevent us from seeing the world as it really is. In Laguna Beach we live in splendid isolation from the poor. But some do live with us and at the portals of our city. Indeed, we do not have to travel many miles to see the worst kind of poverty and hunger. We have developed systematic rationalizations to justify our wealth and the poverty of others. We explain poverty as the result of being the wrong color, being lazy, lacking initiative or good genes. We say, "if the poor want to, they can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps as we have done." We say, "there are plenty of jobs" and fail to see that many of the poor are unable to work or untrained to work. We are the rich who criticize social welfare programs. We are the rich who would rather spend our dollars for weapons to kill than to feed the hungry or to train the poor to develop themselves. We are the rich who are threatened by the hungry poor, and we have shown that we will do anything to maintain the status quo. We are the rich who praise God for our personal, private

salvation, but who are offended by the Bible's cry for social salvation.

How was Luke re-presenting Deuteronomy and thereby adapting the older tradition to his situation? The message of Luke's Gospel is consistent with the whole Old Testament cry for social justice. The law of Deuteronomy 24 called for the just treatment of the poor of Israel. Israel was not to oppress the poor. The nation was always to remember its oppression and poverty in Egyptian slavery and how God redeemed her. To forget the poor, the hungry, the stranger, or the sojourner was to sin against God. In Jesus' words, to treat Lazarus as the rich man did, was to sin against God and incur God's judgment. It was to refuse to hear Moses and to obey his word.

Using their ancient tradition, Jesus called into question how the Pharisees read it. Their hermeneutics were false. Their belief that health and wealth were signs of God's election were wrong. The Lord loves the poor and defends their cause. If God's people have material gifts, they are to use those gifts to serve others and to create a just society.

Was Luke using the hermeneutic of prophetic critique or a constitutive hermeneutic? Clearly this story speaks of the freedom of the God of grace. God is free to love whomever he chooses. If the religious community refuses to hear and to obey Moses and the prophets, they will be judged and separated

from God. In the afterlife, their privileges will be taken away and there will be no comfort. This is the hermeneutic of prophetic critique. In the ultimate order of things, the rich and the powerful lose out unless they use this life as an opportunity for repentance and service.

How do we read this text honestly? God's grace sometimes is experienced as a word of judgment. The fact that Jesus Christ can show us rich ones our insensitivity to the poor is an act of grace. The fact that we sinners still have a chance to respond to the word of God is pure grace. In this honest confrontation, we are invited to hear, to believe, to repent, and to obey. This is God working in and through the scriptures to bring new life.

What does it mean to read the text with humility? Rather than identifying with Lazarus we see ourselves in the rich man. In doing so, we are humbled by discovering our sinfulness. In some contexts we might identify with Lazarus, but for us that would be dishonest. We are the rich man and need to discover a true humility.

Where is the humor in this text? If we think our condition in this life will be the same in the age to come, we better think twice. Destinies have a way of being reversed in God's Kingdom. I find some humor in that. This is the stuff of which the best cartoons are made. This poignant story calls me to a seriousness with God and his will. It

causes me to laugh at my own shallowness. Perhaps our nervous laughter can turn into tears of repentance.

What does this text contribute to our church's self-understanding and mission in the world? As noted earlier, we are a church in a wealthy community. This story informs us that we have a special responsibility to care for the hungry and the poor. To some degree we are doing this already. But we have only just begun. The consciousness of the church needs to be raised on such issues as these. We especially need to realize that just because we have beauty, power, and wealth, that these are no guarantees that we are God's darlings. We dare not look down upon the poor and seek to justify their being poor and our being rich. Rather, we must use our resources and influence to do justice.

Church Context

This sermon was preached on Christmas Sunday 1980. The church was beautifully decorated with trees and ribbons. Everyone was in the spirit of Christmas and the church was packed with all our Christmas visitors. At the high school, our local students were presenting Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol and many had seen it or would see it on television. It seemed a great opportunity to preach on "The Business of Christmas."

Sermon: "The Business of Christmas"

Our world at Christmas time reveals many shocking contrasts. Perhaps the most troubling is that between the rich and the poor. Just the tip of the iceberg was reported last Sunday in the Los Angeles Times.³³ There was a major article on the luxurious fat farm in Tecate, Mexico. For years, wealthy Americans, whose major problem is obesity, have traveled to this posh resort south of the border in hopes of losing pounds of fat created by their abundant lifestyles. Functioning as a social prophet, the Times article pointed out the contrast between the rich, overweight clients who were seeking an inexpensive fat farm and the poor employees of the Rancho who were having difficulty getting enough to eat. Clients of the Rancho, upon visiting the surrounding village, have been shocked by the poverty and the starvation of the villagers. What kind of a world is it at this Christmas time that can live with these striking, troubling contrasts between the rich and the poor?

The Pharisees, in the time of Jesus, had learned to accept, to forget, and to go on living with their society, divided as it was between the rich and the poor. They were lovers of money, who were building their own estates with little sensitivity to the needs of those around them. The

³³Los Angeles Times (December 14, 1980).

spirit of Christmas, which is the spirit of giving, sharing and rejoicing had not touched them. As far as they were concerned, the poor were receiving what they deserved and they, the elect righteous Pharisees had all the symbols of God's blessings. The poor were paying for their sins. The rich were receiving rewards for their righteousness. So why be troubled by the poverty stricken lying at their front door. If a few more of the poor died of starvation, it meant fewer mouths to feed, less population, a normal result of natural selection, a by-product of the struggle for the survival of the fittest.

Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol was written in order to speak to the contrast between the rich and the poor. I hope many of you saw the excellent production this December sponsored by Laguna Beach High School. In the form of a musical comedy the students told the story of ole Ebenezer Scrooge. Scrooge the Pharisee, was a tight, conservative, money lover. He had never been touched by the spirit of Christmas. There was no joy or love in him. His god was money and his preoccupation business. Dickens said of him,

He was a tight fisted hand at the grindstone. A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner. Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, ripped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait, made his eyes red, his thin

lips blue, he carried his own low temperature always with him, he iced his office in the dog-days and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.³⁴

Scrooge believed the poor and the hungry should either be in prison or in the union workhouse. When asked for a contribution for the poor at Christmas time, he responded, "No, I wish to be left alone, I don't make merry myself at Christmas and I can't afford to make the people merry. I help to support the establishments, like the prison and the working houses, they cost enough; and those who are badly off must go there. If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides, it's not my business to know about the poor. It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's."³⁵ Merry Christmas? Bah, humbug.

But Scrooge, like the Pharisee, was not left alone. Christmas was his business. The ghost of his dead partner, Marley, haunted him. Marley's ghost carried around his waist a long chain. The chain was made of cash boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses. The ghost cried, "I wear the chain I forged in life. I make it link by link, and yard by yard. I girded it of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it."³⁶ Marley was doomed to wander the face of the earth because he had never had compassion

³⁴Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol (New York: Pocket Books, 1967), 13.

³⁵Ibid., 26.

³⁶Ibid., 46.

on the poor.

Scrooge could not believe such a judgment. He reminded Marley, "But you were always a good man of business, Jacob." "Business!" cried the ghost, wringing his hands again. "Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business. I suffer most at this time of year. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow beings with my eyes turned down and never raise them to that blessed star which led the wise men to a poor abode? Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted me."³⁷

Marley's words came as a warning to Ebenezer. Scrooge had forged his own chain. He was haunted by the ghost of Christmas pasts. He was confronted by the ghost of Christmas present. He was shown the future by the ghost of Christmas yet to come. He saw and understood his insensitivity, his lack of humanity, his loss of joy, his certain destiny if he continued to be hardhearted.

In the parable which Jesus told, he did the same for the rich man, the Pharisee. The parable of Luke 16 was like a nightmare. The fortunes of Lazarus and the rich man were reversed in the afterlife. The poor was comforted and the

³⁷Ibid., 51-52.

rich man, who had never shown charity or sought to change the situation, was in torment. The parable is a warning to us rich ones, even as Scrooge's vision was a warning to him. The parable is a reminder that "humankind is our business." At Christmas time we are especially reminded that God saw us poor humans as his business. If God can, in the words of James Sanders, "go with Abram to Palestine, down to Egypt, out of Egypt with a motley crew of refugee slaves, through the desert, conquer Palestine with Joshua, and take Jerusalem with David---why not Bethlehem? If God could go all the way from Ur to Jerusalem by way of Egypt and the Sinai desert, don't you suppose he could make it another five miles down to Bethlehem? And if he was with Joseph in prison and granted his presence in the huts and hovels of slaves in Egypt with Moses, don't you reckon he could crouch down into the cradle of a Jew baby in Bethlehem if he was of a mind? The point would be that you don't know what God's already been through if you think he couldn't get into that cradle in Bethlehem and onto that cross on Golgatha---and roll a stone away from a tomb, for that matter, if it was his mind to do so and on his agenda to bring righteousness and salvation to the world in that way."³⁸

The point of Christmas is that God has come to us poor needy people in Jesus to save us, to lift us up, to make us

³⁸James A. Sanders, God Has A Story Too! (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 140.

whole. If God has humbled himself to deliver us poor ones, ought we not see our reason for living as that of stooping to the poor of our time? If God became human that we might share his life, then ought we deny or neglect our true business, the need and condition of those around us to whom we are related by virtue of our common humanity?

Look around you. The poor are everywhere. Not just the materially poor. Thank God, in our country we have made greater strides in helping the materially poor than in many places. But people can be poor in many ways. There are the lonely who are poor in spirit. There are the unloved poor who have no one to care. There are the married poor. Some live in our own households, who desperately need the touch of love from a family member this Christmas. The poor are young, single, and aged. The poor are hungry and well fed. The poor are healthy and sick. Are these who are poor our business? You bet they are! Some of them sit at the doors of our own homes and we see them not as we come and go. They long for crumbs of love from our table. Tragically, those of us who have the resources to give, whether it be money, time, interest or just a word, have often, like Marley, Scrooge and the Pharisees, mistaken our true business and as a result have forged long chains which shall bind us forever unless we be liberated by the power of this word of God. For if the Pharisees had Moses and the prophets, so do we. The words of Moses, the prophets, and of Jesus Christ call us to hear, to

believe, to repent, and to attend to the true business of Christmas, of showing compassion to the poor, Poverty in this life is not a sign of God's displeasure nor punishment for sin. The poor present us an opportunity to show that the love of God dwells in our hearts.

May this word of God, on this Christmas Sunday be sufficient to change us, to fill us with compassion, and may we like Scrooge, be set free to celebrate this Christmas by giving ourselves away in love. Merry Christmas!

CHAPTER IV

PREACHING EVALUATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF
EDMUND A. STEIMLE AND FRED B. CRADDOCK

In this final chapter it is my purpose to reflect on my preaching of Luke's central section from the perspective of two modern teachers of preaching, namely Edmund A. Steimle and Fred B. Craddock. Three books were particularly helpful in giving to me a model for this reflection. Preaching the Story¹ by Steimle, Niedenthal, and Rice provides the basic model by suggesting that four factors must be kept in mind at once in any holistic view of preaching. They are the preacher, the listener, the churchly context including the institutional organization, and the message. Fred Craddock's As One Without Authority² and Overhearing the Gospel,³ will be used to expand and interpret the above four factors of preaching.

In the introduction to their book, Steimle, Niedenthal, and Rice suggest that any of the four factors of

¹Preaching the Story, ed. by Edmund A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal and Charles L. Rice (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 1.

²Fred B. Craddock, As One Without Authority (Enid: Phillips University Press, 1974).

³Fred B. Craddock, Overhearing the Gospel (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978).

preaching taken by themselves are inadequate. They each have strengths and weaknesses. Preaching is an event-- "a moment, a meeting, a sudden seeing--in which preacher, listener, the message, and the impinging social environment all come together."⁴ They argue that we preachers each have an assumed model for preaching. What is needed is a model in the form of an image. The image that one has in his/her mind will mold each sermon given. The image of the storyteller is suggested as the model. "If we were pressed to say what christian faith and life are, we could hardly do better than hearing, telling, and living a story. And if asked for a short definition of preaching could we do better than shared story?"⁵ Effective preaching integrates the stories of the preacher, the listeners, the church, and the message.

THE PREACHER

The treasure of the gospel has been given to us by preachers who are like earthen vessels. Along the way of our lives The Story of God's love has intersected with our story and we have felt the call to preach. From beginning to end, our stories are being shaped and formed by the Story. The living Word lives in us and seeks to be

⁴Morris J. Niedenthal and Charles L. Rice, "Preaching as Shared Story," in Preaching the Story, 9.

⁵Ibid., 13.

revealed through us. Of course this is a mystery. How can God, through the foolishness of our preaching, become real to those who hear us? Only faith can sustain such an assumption.

Each of the three books cited above emphasizes the importance of the preacher. He or she is the storyteller who bends toward the story and toward those who hear, in faith and hope, that God's word may be spoken again in a new context. Each book argues that it is important and legitimate for the truth to find expression through the personality of the preacher. This does not mean the pulpit is to be transformed into a confessional booth in which the preacher vents his/her own frustrations, disobedience, and lack of faith. Nor is the pulpit the place to celebrate the virtue and strength of the preacher's faith. Given this, it is important for the preacher's humanity to be disclosed in his preaching. In speaking the Word, the preacher reveals himself and shares his own humanity, not only in the words spoken, but in the totality of lifestyle and behavior.

Being human serves the gospel. The more we feel free to be ourselves, to be with people, to be free to make mistakes and to fail, to celebrate small victories and to cry when the tears well up, the more we are likely to serve the Word of God. A large part of our vocation as preachers is to let ourselves flow more freely in the currents of human life, and to keep ourselves open to hear and speak the Word at the confluence of our stories and God's Story. . . . Who then is this person who is preaching? First of all, a human being, and the preacher who gives to a listening congregation no convincing

evidence of that shared membership in a common humanity is a preacher who has already forfeited any right to be taken seriously.⁶

But what sort of humans are we to be? Our congregations know we are human. I believe we are to be humans in whom God's grace is at work in life transforming ways that lead to wholeness and congruence. While it is true that the efficacy of God's Word should not be too closely tied to the life of the messenger, distance between teller and story can be finally fatal. Craddock is powerful at this point. Following Søren Kierkegaard, he argues that those who would be communicators of the Christian faith must be gripped by intensity, discipline, passion, and pathos.⁷ An effective preacher is one who participates in the story he tells. "Appropriation of the gospel is the minimum condition for approaching pulpit or podium. From the standpoint of the hearers, the qualities of the teller affect the response to the story."⁸ "The point is this: discipline and patient submission to the Word are the way to gain access to the Word to be shared. Is it hard study? Yes. Is it prayer? Yes. Is it worship? Yes."⁹ According to Craddock, our preaching is an art of worship and we

⁶Charles L. Rice, "The Preacher's Story," in Preaching the Story, 26-27.

⁷Craddock, Overhearing, 42-43.

⁸Ibid., 43.

⁹Ibid., 44.

offer our words up to God. "Regardless of the constituency of the class or congregation, the real audience is God. What we say or write, we offer to God. . . . Those before us are overhearing what we say to God."¹⁰ But Craddock asks, "Why all this heavy sense of personal participation; after all, we preach not ourselves but Christ?"¹¹ He answers with three statements.

1. Christian truth is simply not transmitted objectively as a thing, a statement, a piece of information, autonomous and unrelated to speaker and hearer.

2. The act of communicating the gospel is in its very nature an act of passion.

3. Christian communication cannot tolerate the distance of non participation between messenger and message because, to put it bluntly, that distance permits too much room for our own frailties to take over, our minds limping along behind rationalizing and excusing behavior and attitudes that contradict our message. Against the background noise of the gradual erosion of the speaker's soul, the message is blurred and indistinct.¹²

In preaching there is an "I" and a "Thou."

But what of the authority of the preacher? Steimle argues that ultimately the preacher is driven not to his own human authority, but to the authority of the Word itself and to the authority of the community which ordained him/her.¹³ The office of preaching belongs to the church and not to the person of the preacher. This is what the

¹⁰Ibid., 47.

¹¹Ibid., 49.

¹²Ibid., 50-51.

¹³Edmund A. Steimle, "By What Authority," in Preaching the Story, 39.

vestments, the clericals represent. One's personal witness is undergirded by the witness of the church which ordained. However, there are times, in preaching the Bible, in which the preacher must preach against the community of believers. Steimle suggests that when the preacher assumes the prophetic role, he/she does so on the basis of conscience illuminated by Scripture, not in the heat of anger or frustration.¹⁴

Preachers will never fail to identify themselves with that aspect of life in the community of believers against which the prophetic Word is proclaimed. Prophetic judgment is never addressed to "you" but to "us." "We" are under the judgment of God. "You and I" live under God's judgment, rather than the community of believers living under the judgment of the preacher.¹⁵

Steimle's image of the preacher is that of the Bible in uplifted hand, as the image of the preacher's authority.

There are three stories implicit in that image: 1) The biblical story, apart from which there would be no preaching; 2) the preacher's own individual story, through which the biblical story is filtered and which adds the preacher's own individual witness that the biblical story has in fact become the preacher's story; 3) the story of the listeners, the community of believers, who have provided the place and occasion for preaching and who have called the preacher to do on their behalf what the preacher has been trained by them to do--so to interpret the biblical story that light is shed on all three stories.¹⁶

By way of summary then, the preacher is one who

¹⁴Ibid., 41.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

is set apart by the church to preach. He/she is trained to preach the Bible, the Word of God, in the fullness of his/her humanity. The preacher lives by the grace of God as does every other member of the church. He/she is the storyteller who has been gripped passionately by the living Word, Jesus Christ. The preacher, to be effective, must participate in the story he/she tells. The church expects the preacher to be an authentic Christian who is seeking to grow and mature along with other Christians. The preacher's authority resides in his/her ability to integrate the Story with his/her own story and the story of the listeners.

In using James Sanders' hermeneutical questions in studying Luke's central section, my own humanity was placed under a prophetic critique. Over and over I found my own Christian identity called into question. As a representative of the Christian community, I could certainly identify with the pharisees and sadducees, the priests and levites of Luke's story. Also in coming from an upper middle class community, Luke's words to the rich were troubling. One of the more difficult tasks of this project has been the personal appropriation of Luke's stinging critique of my easy Christianity. Throughout the sermons I have given great care to the use of personal pronouns. I have sought to use "we" and "us." Some of these sermons could have really hurt my people if I had not preached to

myself as well. In several places in the sermons, as I made application to the congregation I also sought to reveal myself. In the sermon "Appearances Are Deceiving" I said:

I understand the journey because I have been on it--scratching, clawing, kicking, screaming, working, trying to get the most out of life I thought possible. Most of my friends in the ministry look at me and humorously suggest that I've made it. My parents rejoice, and from time to time, people ask enviously, "How did you manage to get to Laguna Beach?" Sometimes I feel like saying, "Because I worked harder than you. I'm more gifted than you. God loves me more than you. My education is superior."

Here I was opening my humanity to my people in a painful way, yet a truthful way. In these types of efforts I have always found appreciation from my people. There is power in the personal, not just as an illustration, but as a way of helping a congregation understand that the preacher also lives his life in submission to the Word.

I have also come to believe that the types of sermons in this project can only be done in the context of trust. My congregation knows me well. They know I love them and I know they love me. While some may have been offended by some of the sermons, they could hear them because of the integrity of the pastoral relationship.

To conclude, this preaching assignment has deepened my spiritual life. It was hard work, but in addition it has driven me to pray for God's help in preaching, as never before. These sermons often left me in the silence of personal solitude before God before whom they were

spoken. In those moments I have met my ego needs face to face. My own need to be popular by supporting the Orange County lifestyle of beauty, power, and economic success has died a hard death. But what does one do when the Scriptures speak so plainly and powerfully to the aspirations of our flesh? One either repents and is faithful, or one forgets the Bible and goes the way of the world. It is at that crossroads that the preacher either is credible or plays a game.

THE LISTENERS

The storyteller tells the Story to listeners. Sunday after Sunday people gather in churches to hear the Story. But what kind of people are they? Niedenthal and Rice suggest that from one point of view preaching is essentially effective communication.¹⁷ If the preacher is to be effective he/she must know the people, their needs, their problems, their expectations, and their joys. People also live in a social and cultural context which affects them, their cognitive levels, their value formation, and their symbolic and linguistic framework. But how is the preacher to really know the needs of his/her people? The preacher lives in the same social, cultural context and has many of the same needs as his/her people. Often what we think are our needs are not, from the Bible's perspective. Few

¹⁷Preaching the Story, 5.

of us would consider our basic need as repentance, forgiveness, and faith. Humans often refuse the thing they need most.

Charles Rice makes the point that a community tells its story--to itself--as culture.¹⁸ This story telling takes different forms; urban planning, the arts, cooking, advertising, architecture, religious observance, dress, patterns of work, and forms of leisure. People's values are reflected in the way they use their surplus time and energy. Rice argues that there is a common humanity, a common citizenship of shared values. There is a corporate autobiography.

Dean Hoge says that most of us live by values which express themselves in powerful social realities: family, career, standard of living, and health. Hoge believes that behind all ideological loyalties, religious confessions, public orations, and national creeds, this hierarchy which can be understood as a creed and given creedal form, is what actually determines our economic, political, and religious behavior. Politicians are elected, leaders rewarded, denominations adhered to, and social and ethnic groups variously tolerated, exploited, or segregated according to their serviceability in terms of this tacit creed. Among church members there is a fairly easy identification of Christ with these values, a fact which is apparent across a spectrum so wide as to include both a demanding and doctrinaire mormonism and the popular optimism of much electronic religion.¹⁹

Rice's conclusion is troubling for any preacher who challenges the culture. He states:

¹⁸Charles L. Rice, "The Story of Our Times," in Preaching the Story, 55.

¹⁹Ibid., 56.

Preaching will be accepted by listeners so long as it conforms with their basic view of the world in terms of family, career, and standard of living. When it does not fit that grid, it will more likely be tolerated as "just preaching" or rejected outright as being irrelevant. Is it not time that we know at some deep level the story by which people, including ourselves, are living--and the near impossibility of shaking any of those foundations? What is important for preachers is to see that there are stresses within the culture itself which may become the openings through which the gospel can enter and transform our common life. The story of our times is not altogether cohesive, and it is at the points where "things fall apart and the center cannot hold" that we wait for the advent of the Word of God.²⁰

Rice proceeds to speak of several cracks now visible in our culture. One of those cracks is the tension between the individual and the community. Both history and geography have made us individualists, but our life altogether conflicts with that characteristic. "Privacy and individuality are essential to the health of the community, but privatism and individualism are inimical to it."²¹ Rice asks if we still have a chance to achieve community? He suggests we do not unless we face up to ourselves. The present alternatives are not adequate. They are:

a nostalgic conservatism holding out for a pristine way of life that never was; a possibility theology which turns away from the dark side of life and ignores the central image of the Christian faith, the cross; and a spate of egocentric movements which have turned a method into an ideology, so that everything is pronounced O.K. Only a very affluent and constantly entertained society can survive for long on such

²⁰Ibid., 58-59.

²¹Ibid., 60.

placebos. What we are looking for is a way to face the world as it is and each other as we are and still be able to give and receive freedom. We want, in short, to be together, but not merely on the ground of respectability, illusion, or downright hypocrisy.²²

Another tension or crack is that of pluralism and provincialism. Rice asks how the preacher can enable listeners to understand who they are as unique persons and where they have come from--without allowing them to become mere egotists? A third polarity is that of power and limits. We moderns have tremendous mobility, yet we need to learn to live within the limits of the human community. In the final analysis life is lived out in one locale, with certain people to whom we must relate. Another polarity we find is the use and abuse of the earth's resources. What does it mean to live well on the earth? Rice identifies one final polarity in our culture, that of poetry and positivism. "Our allies in the preaching of the gospel are not the positivists--those who have it all sewn up--but the open-eyed, awestruck poets."²³

Rice argues that we preachers have not truly allowed ourselves to hear the gospel of Christ. We have too often used the parables of Christ to reinforce rather than to challenge the cultural religion. Somehow the preacher must seek to preach new parables in terms of his/her own culture. The Story of Jesus' parables call forth story.

²²Ibid., 61.

²³Ibid., 68.

Fred Craddock suggests that our culture has heard the gospel so often that it can no longer hear it. Quoting Kierkegaard he says, "There is no lack of information in a Christian land, something else is missing and this is a something which the one man cannot directly communicate to the other."²⁴ He argues that there is an illusion of participation in a Christian land. In hearing the gospel the listeners are often just plain bored. "Chances are very good not only that they will say even of good sermons that they had heard it all before, but if what they hear is different from what they have been accustomed to hearing, in manner or in matter, they will suspect that it was not a sermon or not Christian."²⁵ The task of the communicator is to break the illusion, to be a troubler within Israel. The preacher must assume that the modern American listener is not ignorant in search of understanding, not hungry and thirsty, not groping in the darkness for relief. The listener is familiar with churches, worship services, the Bible, study groups, and religious literature. I believe Craddock's assessment of the listener may be true for those of the South or the Bible Belt but not for Southern California in general. I would not want to assume that there is much biblical information in our people. Here, most of our people are in church by choice and not by habit.

²⁴Craddock, Overhearing, 9.

²⁵Ibid, 25.

Ours is a frontier, mission outpost, that is only just beginning to take on an identity. Those who come to worship tend to be deeply serious about it, even though somewhat casual about lifestyle.

Craddock suggests that those who are entrapped by the illusion of participation will never be able to hear the Story directly. They must be led to it indirectly. Actually, he encourages the preacher to be both direct and indirect. Hearing forms of teaching and preaching like Jesus', the listener will be enabled to overhear the gospel if he perceives that it is not directly addressed to him. The Story will engage him as he overhears it, and as a result, he will perhaps really hear it for the first time. In overhearing the message, distance and participation are maintained. "The Word does not have its source in the listener. This I am calling distance."²⁶ "Participation means the listener overcomes the distance, not because the speaker 'applied' everything, but because the listener identified with experiences and thoughts related in the message that were analogous to his own."²⁷

Craddock argues for inductive preaching in As One Without Authority. Traditional preaching is deductive. Preaching has power when it is inductive, that is, when it leads the listener to dialogue with the message step by

²⁶Ibid., 122.

²⁷Ibid., 128.

step along the way to the point the preacher seeks to make. This kind of preaching affects transformation in lives and in the structures of society. Inductive preaching moves from the particular of an experience that has a familiar ring in the listener's ears to a general truth or conclusion. The American way of life is inductive and to maintain interest, to communicate, to change life, the preacher must lead the listener to the truth, step by step. Fundamental to this approach is the assumption that the experiences and viewpoints of the listeners constitute a part of the experience of the Word of God in the sermon.

In preaching on Luke's central section of the Gospel, I made many assumptions about our Orange County culture within which we live. There is much in this culture that might be called the best of White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant America. We place high value on the rugged individual who makes his own way to financial success. Our church is dominated by members of the Republican Party who overwhelmingly elected Ronald Reagan, President of the United States. The South Coast of Orange County is inhabited by those who have successfully competed and now find themselves at the top of the ladder socially, politically, and economically. What has emerged is a cultural doctrine of election that has deep support throughout American history. It is silently assumed that our brand of Americanism is synonymous with Christianity. The wealthy American citizen, the individual, who wraps himself

in the flag and the constitution, who stands alone, who exploits the land, who accumulates capital, who exercises freedom, who mixes his labor with the things of nature and produces private property, who demands no interference by government into his life, who sees the poor as weaklings, who believes in the doctrine of manifest destiny, quietly assumes that he is God's elect and likewise is his nation. Luke calls this doctrine of election into question and tells us that the privileged, the rich, the powerful, the religious may not be God's elect people. Just the opposite! God, Luke suggests, has a predisposition in favor of the poor and those who have no social standing. This is a painful word, but it needs to be heard in a county that has an abundance of culture affirmers.

In my first sermon I presented Christ's radical demands of discipleship. I spoke to our cultural narcissism that seeks therapy, pleasure, and self-realization. To those of us who seek our lives, Jesus invites us to go to Jerusalem with him. That invitation is a big "no" to our whole world view. In 1980, two of our national cultural cracks were Vietnam and Iran. Both defeats were an affront to God's elect people who had been operating on the doctrine of manifest destiny in exporting the blessings of the American way of life. I suggested that we could perhaps understand the disciples' desire to call fire down on those who had humiliated us.

In the second sermon I challenged our communities' "laid back," casual attitude toward God and the mission of the church. Our easy lifestyle in the pursuit of retirement and pleasure can cause us to lose our sensitivity to the really important issues of life. The mission of the church is dangerous in a community that is content, that does not want to be challenged, that holds values and belief systems different than the gospel's. Clearly, what I was suggesting was a conflict between our individualistic values and the need for community responsibility.

The third sermon was delivered as a prophetic critique of the religious right wing in the Fall of 1980. The question of "Who is my neighbor?" was at the center of the political campaign that fall. The story of the good samaritan was translated into a contemporary happening based in much of the right-wing rhetoric in the 1980 presidential campaign.

In the fourth sermon I spoke to our infatuation with wealth, on stewardship Sunday. I suggested that the rich man in the parable was each of us wealthy ones in Laguna Beach. In our quest to build our estates we may be covetous and lose our souls. Riches are no guarantee of eternal life. We forget we are but pilgrims and stewards and think we are owners.

In the fifth sermon I spoke to the anxiety of our people about the basic needs of their lives. The sermon

called us to trust in God the giver of every perfect gift. The sixth sermon challenged us to faithful stewardship as we live out our lives between the promise and the fulfillment of life.

The seventh sermon was a direct confrontation with our cultural doctrine of election. As those who think they are God's elect because they are wealthy Americans, we are judged by Jesus' story in Luke 14. It reminds us that those around God's table are those who know their spiritual poverty and live by the grace of God. The eighth sermon spoke again to our "layed back" spectator mentality in the things that relate to our church community. I suggested that we have become a nation of spectators and Christ calls us to renounce this and commit ourselves to his community. The ninth sermon was a reflection on how many have become lost to God in seeking to find themselves. The good news is that God seeks us lost ones. The tenth sermon probed our attitude about the poor and made the point that the business of Christmas ought to be our concern for the poor at our door.

What these sermons reflect are assumptions made about the culture of Orange County that influences us all. I believe I read the cultural context of our people correctly. If anything, I overemphasized this context at a difficult time of the church year. However, these themes are so important in Luke's central section that it is

difficult to avoid them. The preacher needs always to maintain a balance between a prophetic and a constitutive hermeneutic. At times this was difficult. This leads me to suggest that I might have been better off in using a variety of themes from the central sections, rather than the constant confrontation with the culture. I was looking for this as the thrust in each pericope of the central section. I now believe that this section of Luke's gospel is more diverse and rich in themes than simply the "doctrine of election" discussion. This is not to deny the centrality of Luke's concern over an inverted doctrine of election. However, Jesus' teachings on discipleship and prayer provide some relief to the heaviness of the prophetic critique. One has trouble in calling his people's election into question each Sunday at a time when he is seeking to build up their identity.

There was at every point, as I see it now, a tension in my mind between our culture's identity and our congregation's identity. It may be one thing to prophetically critique one's culture and another thing to critique one's own congregation. In this sense the sermons may all be too general and not specific enough in dealing with where our particular people were at. It is difficult to describe because another part of our cultural doctrine implies a certain privatism which makes people resistant to being known. The preacher is driven to newspapers and books and

observations. At times the preacher must simply fly by the seat of his pants in seeking to understand and interpret his people. In doing so, he also speaks of himself, his own dreams, hopes, fears, and anxieties. The exegesis of life is as difficult as the exegesis of Scripture.

In general, I agree with Craddock that one must use direct and indirect means in communicating the gospel. My sermons were probably too direct an assault upon the culture for people to effectively hear. The story form was not used effectively enough. In reevaluating the sermons there seems to be a blend of deductive and inductive logic. The most effective sermons were those that began with my experience or the experience of our people and led to the point the biblical text was making.

THE CHURCHLY CONTEXT

Niedenthal and Rice make the point that preachers are organizational people and their sermons essentially promotion or persuasion.²⁸ Preachers preach the party line, imploring people to attend church regularly, to participate faithfully in the activities of the congregation, and to give generously to the work of the kingdom in the church.

I had not given much thought to this institutional view of preaching until I read their book, but in reading

²⁸Preaching the Story, 6.

it and reflecting on my sermons on Luke, I realized that the needs of the church in regard to stewardship of time and money had been almost controlling in the whole series. One of the reasons I chose the passages dealing with money and riches was our fall stewardship program. I was seeking to have our people put God first in their lives not only in regard to their financial giving but also in their active ownership of the mission goals of the church. I was setting before them the call of Christ to travel as his disciples on their way in Laguna Beach, to renounce their Orange County values, and to actively participate in the building of a new world which would literally reverse the way of the surrounding world for the sake of the kingdom. This new world takes shape in the church and I was promoting the church. As I reflect upon much of my preaching over these past ten years, I now see that the churchly, institutional context has dominated much of my thought. I believe this is a dimension of preaching that is most important for the transformation and growth of a church.

One cannot think of the churchly context of preaching without considering its liturgical and pastoral perspective. For some time prior to the Fall of 1980 we had heard rumblings about the meaning and purpose of worship. In Orange County there is a strong preference for the non-traditional. Some of the most successful churches are those that have de-emphasized worship in a traditional sense.

They seek to interest people in a church that is as little like the mainline churches as possible. We have had our share of these people who were unhappy with a traditional order of worship and traditional hymns. They wanted to get together for a few gospel tunes, some testimonies, and a short, entertaining sermon that would affirm their lifestyle, make them feel spiritual, and send them away feeling good. Each week during the Fall of 1980 we included in the bulletin an interpretation of our presbyterian order of worship. Central to our worship is the awareness of our dialogue with the living Word of God. God addresses us through Scripture, Sermon, and Sacrament. We have felt the need to have as much flexibility, participation, and spontaneity as possible within the context of our basic order. I have always believed that the church needs a serious proclamation of the Word at the very center of the worship and that all portions of the scriptures needed to be read and preached. In the Fall of 1980 we were interpreting our flexible, yet traditional order of worship, while speaking prophetically to the congregation. That must have seemed a bit incongruous to the listeners.

In chapter six of Steimle, Niedenthal and Rice, Norman Neaves²⁹ asks how it is possible to preach prophetically without alienating one's congregation; and

²⁹ Norman Neaves, "Preaching in Pastoral Perspective," in Preaching the Story, 107-120.

second, how one can be prophetic without impairing one's role in pastoral care. Is it possible to be a pastor and a prophet at the same time? "Can one stand 'over against' a congregation in the tradition of a prophet and proclaim the unequivocal 'thus saith the Lord' while at the same time being identified with the congregation in the tradition of a priest and mediating the comfort of grace?"³⁰ Neaves came to the conclusion that his prophetic preaching had to grow out of his own identification with his people in the church. "I am less and less interested in preaching to them about the great moral issues of the day than I am in struggling with them through the complex dilemmas in which we find ourselves."³¹ Neaves argues that the sheer complexity of the issues which confront the world makes it difficult to be an absolutist and to declare "thus saith the Lord." Therefore, he seeks to raise questions in thoughtful and profound ways. He suggests that searching questions searchingly posed may have more power to awaken the contemporary conscience than any other means. "Maybe prophetic preaching is that which addresses and struggles with and lives the great questions of life with a group of people who are called the church--the kind of prophetic preaching that Jesus did with the woman at the well when

³⁰ Ibid., 112.

³¹ Ibid., 113.

his probing questions helped center her in the deeper concerns of her life."³²

While there is some pastoral wisdom in Neaves' approach, I also feel it is a "cop-out" that many preachers use for not dealing with controversial subjects. Often I have been exhorted by members of the church to be more accepting in my sermons of their prejudices and life styles. Most issues are complex and not simple, but does that mean there is no "Word of God" on the subject that need be proclaimed authoritatively? Too easily we prophets are tamed into parish priests. In reading the Gospel of Luke, we do not see Jesus preaching questions or struggling with the complexities of life. It was Jesus' use of the hermeneutic of prophetic critique that led to his crucifixion, just as it is possible to be so confrontive and direct that the listener cannot "hear" the message. Of course, we preach with humility, aware that the very words we use impact upon the emotions of our hearers. The preacher's passion ought to be the getting of an honest hearing of the Word and not in bawling out his people for their sins.

THE MESSAGE

Steimle makes the point that the reason for the biblical story in the first place is the conflict between good and evil, the conflict between God's good will of love

³²Ibid., 115.

for humanity and humanity's refusal to live in accordance with God's good will.³³ Evil is simply the refusal to trust God and his will for us and for our future. God's strategy has been to evoke a person's freedom to choose. Following Reinhold Niebuhr, Steimle suggests that anxiety about our creaturely insecurity leads us humans to assert ourselves in pride in order to secure ourselves. We seek to be our own god and to trust in ourselves, therefore we rebel against the rule of God. But God wills to save us and to evoke trust and love within us.

Evil is both personal and collective. The prophets spoke God's judgment not only upon individual and personal evils but also upon the evils of the church and the state. Steimle argues that the biblical story is not basically or primarily a story of judgment. It is a story of God's grace, of his faithfulness, of his trustworthiness.³⁴ God has a strategy, i.e., to evoke faith, trust, and obedience to his will. This strategy for dealing with evil becomes plain in the Christ story. "The whole biblical story of good and evil comes to rest in the resurrection. For the resurrection means that evil does not have the last word. God and his will of love have the last word. When evil has done its worst, in and through me as well as in and through

³³Edmund A. Steimle, "The Story of Good and Evil," in Preaching the Story, 130.

³⁴Ibid., 132.

others, there is always the possibility of a new beginning."³⁵

Biblical preaching rehearses this story week after week until it becomes a part of each person and of the church. Steimle asserts that there is a place for prophetic preaching. The purpose of prophetic preaching will be to uncover evil and the potential for evil in even the best of us.

But the major emphasis in biblical preaching, as in the biblical story, will be to evoke faith and trust in God's faithfulness and thus make possible obedience and salvation from the anxieties which cripple us. It will evoke it by calling attention to where God's faithfulness can be seen and experienced today and by pointing to his promises for the future.³⁶

Steimle instructs the preacher to realize that the biblical story shifts in response to the human or worldly situation. "Differing human situations elicited different emphases in the Word of God."³⁷ Therefore, the biblical preacher must discover what is the crying need of his/her time. Steimle suggests that we live in an "age of anxiety." "For piled on top of the common creaturely anxiety, the anxiety of recognized mortality, are all the massive and apparently unmanageable problems of our world. So for a lot of us the problem is not so much an angry and wrathful God but the very real possibility that life is simply meaningless and hopeless, and that the problems we face are too overwhelming and unmanageable."³⁸

³⁵Ibid., 133.

³⁶Ibid., 134.

³⁷Ibid., 135.

³⁸Ibid., 136.

He goes on to suggest that the human problem is a mixture of hubris and acedia. Pride and uncaring, collective irresponsibility and indifference need to be addressed by the biblical preacher. The Story keeps us from losing hope. "The biblical story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. But the end of the story is safely in God's hands. Life does win out over death in the end. God's good will for his world will defeat evil in the end."³⁹ Biblical preaching will keep bringing us back to The Story in the light of our stories and the story of our times. If we hang on to The Story, we shall not be lost.

Steimle's emphasis upon the Story needs to be remembered by the preacher. This thought would have helped me in preaching from Luke's central section. Jesus' prophetic critique of the pharisees doctrine of election must be seen in the context of the whole story. His critique was given so that they might hear God's word "to repent," and participate in the joy of salvation. One must remember that God's judgment is an expression of his grace. Jesus rebuked the pharisees in order to heal them and we preach prophetically that our hearers might repent and be saved. An understanding that God's judgment is his grace can allow the preacher greater personal authority and confidence. Why do we preach if not to heal, to redeem, to make whole? If we do not relate judgment as grace in our sermons, then

³⁹Ibid., 138.

we are decidedly unbiblical in our preaching. Prophetic preaching must be done then in the context of God's grace and saving purpose. This may indeed be the central discovery of this project. In evaluating myself, I must be fair and say, I made every effort to maintain a balance between the judgment and grace of God.

In another article, Steimle comments on the fabric of the sermon.⁴⁰ He argues that the fabric or texture of the sermon, as well as its content must be determined by the Bible. Form and content cannot be divorced. Craddock makes the same point. In describing the fabric of the sermon, Steimle makes several points. First, the fabric of the biblical witness is completely and thoroughly secular.⁴¹ This means the fabric of the sermon must be worldly and secular. The sermon will reflect the actual world in which we live. Preaching is unbiblical if it is just addressed to the "private sector" of an individual's life. This sector is totally immersed in the public sector of which each individual is a part: "the public world of politics, race relations, corporations, labor unions, and other power structures."⁴² It is the preacher's hermeneutical task to translate the Bible's message in terms of the present

⁴⁰ Edmund A. Steimle, "The Fabric of the Sermon," in Preaching the Story, 163-175.

⁴¹ Ibid., 165.

⁴² Ibid., 167.

secular situation.

Secondly, the fabric of the sermon will not only be secular but also dialogical. The language of the Bible is dialogical, i.e., dialogue between God and man and man and humanity. The questions and issues with which a preacher deals must really reflect the questions and issues which his listeners have. This can only mean that the preacher must be sensitive to his people and allow them to shape his message.

Thirdly, biblical rhetoric takes the form of a story told, as a whole and in its parts. "If a sermon is to be biblical at its deepest level, it will draw us into the development of a plot or story, the end of which is still in doubt."⁴³ Likewise, the biblical story is told chiefly in the indicative mood. "Report the facts of life as accurately, factually, and imaginatively as possible, then let the Holy Spirit and the listener work it out from there."⁴⁴

Fourthly, the sermon must be lean and spare as is the fabric of the Bible. There is no wordiness, no superfluity of adjectives, in the Bible. The narratives are lean and spare, making their point briefly and sharply. This will force the preacher to be specific and action oriented in his language.

I believe my sermons reflect the secular situation

⁴³Ibid., 171.

⁴⁴Ibid., 172.

of our people. They were an attempt to translate the biblical texts into the secular context of today. Dr. Sanders' hermeneutical questions have the power to unlock the meaning of the text in its original context and to allow one to move into its present meaning. The dialogical fabric of the sermons might have been improved by engaging the people in the process of my preparation. The pressures of time made that almost impossible. However, I believe I was dealing with the questions and issues of our people's lives. The story fabric of the sermons vary in quality from one to another. I believe some are excellent. The indicative mood needs to be improved in some of them. In general, I need to improve in allowing the sermon to be more open ended so as to allow the Spirit to work and the people to decide. The sermons have been written with as much precision as possible. They were more wordy in their oral form, but freedom from the manuscript was worth it.

Niedenthal, in "The Irony and Grammar of the Gospel,"⁴⁵ makes some points that I think deserve reviewing in the light of Dr. Sanders' hermeneutical methodology. He argues that

irony originates in the perception of an incongruity between what is and what ought to be. It involves a conflict between pretense and reality. In classical Greek comedy this conflict was presented by two characters, one called the aladzon, the other the eiron. The aladzon was usually a pompous fool, a pretender who appeared to be greater, more heroic, than he actually was. The eiron, who is the aladzon's

⁴⁵Morris J. Niedenthal, "The Irony of the Gospel," in Preaching the Story, 141-150.

antagonist, is the sly, shrewd dissimulator who poses as less than he is. In the Bible God's man is often an ironical man, one who appears to be less than he is, and God's people are often presented as aladzons, pompous fools and pretenders. The outcome of the conflict between the two often consists of the humiliation of the aladzon and the triumph of the eiron.⁴⁶

Jesus is often presented as an ironical man. He appears to be less than he is. "He is a carpenter from Nazareth, a wandering lay preacher, unordained, and yet he confounds the scribes and Pharisees and exposes their pretense and hypocrisy."⁴⁷ Niedenthal summarizes his biblical findings in four points:

- (1) The perception of an incongruity between what is and what ought to be.
- (2) This perception is based on a vision or a revelation of truth.
- (3) Unlike the laughter which satisfies and pleases, ironic criticism hurts.
- (4) Ironic criticism aims to amend the incongruity, not to destroy or annihilate it (as in sarcasm).⁴⁸

Biblical irony is expressed in understatement. Heroic perception and statement are expressed in overstatement. The biblical writers use irony rather than heroic presentations in regard to the biblical characters. "They often shame people for their lack of faith and lack of

⁴⁶Ibid., 142.

⁴⁷Ibid., 143.

⁴⁸Ibid.

courage instead of describing hero figures for them to emulate."⁴⁹ Sounding like James Sanders, Niedenthal writes of our father Abraham who received a lecture on ethics from the pharaoh of Egypt. "Abraham is no hero figure. He is a biblical figure, and his story is typical: the biblical writers often use irony instead of heroic overstatement."⁵⁰ This allows us to identify with Abraham by means of dynamic analogy; likewise, we may identify with Jesus as he wept in the Garden. Also, the contrast between ironic and heroic statements is evident in the parable of the good Samaritan. Jesus held up for the lawyer, as an example, a pagan, a spiritual bastard, known to be outside the company of God's people. Jesus says, "Now look, an outsider can act humanly and decently. Shouldn't it be even more possible for you, my chosen people?"⁵¹

This was the same point I made in my sermon on the parable. By using dynamic analogy we get the power of the parable. The Samaritan does not come off a hero, rather as one who performs a human act of service. Niedenthal suggests we should see ourselves and the church identified in the scribes and pharisees, and the samaritans identified in unchurched people around us. "Irony calls attention to and celebrates that amazing grace of God which exposes

⁴⁹Ibid., 144.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., 145.

religious pretension and which utilizes sinners in the advancement and fulfillment of his purpose. Irony affirms human beings in the concrete actuality of each: a mixture of weakness and strength, cowardice and courage, sin and faith."⁵²

Niedenthal concludes that the grammar of the gospel opens a new and different future by declaring an action of God which alters the meaning of the past. The grammar of the gospel theologizes. Secondly, the grammar of the gospel does not presuppose strength but seeks to create it by ministering to need and weakness. "The grammar of the gospel stresses the declarative clause and sentence: Because A, therefore B."⁵³ Niedenthal and Sanders would be in agreement on the Bible's use of irony. The use of irony releases the humor in Luke's central section. It is painful humor. Dynamic analogy allows us to see the painful pretenses in ourselves and in the church. It hurts, but it heals as we are reminded that God has acted to save us. Luke's use of irony allows us to repent and receive the grace of God.

Fred Craddock, in As One Without Authority, argues the importance of the spoken word. Being or Reality come to expression in words. What this implies for speakers is that they must also be listeners. One listens to a text

⁵²Ibid., 146.

⁵³Ibid., 148.

hopeful that it will shed light on our situation. "The Word of God is not interpreted; it interprets. The goal of biblical study is to allow God to address man through the medium of the text."⁵⁴ Craddock sees three implications for the preacher. "First, if God addresses man through the text, the Word of God must, by its very nature, be spoken. Secondly, the preacher must see himself first of all as a listener to the Word of God. Thirdly, the spoken word is primary and fundamental. It presupposes that which it also creates: community."⁵⁵ For Craddock, the Word of God is both objective and subjective truth. "The Gospel is Truth for us."⁵⁶ Those who listen to the Word are participants in the story. It is in its sharing that the Word has its existence.

The minister is the frail bridge that connects the church and its Scripture.

His sermons will possess the unity not of a monologue of the church to the Scripture nor of the Scripture to the church but the unity that characterizes all genuine dialogue. It is fabric woven of two distinct and always perceptible threads: the situation addressed precedes the Word of God; the Word of God precedes the situation.⁵⁷

The Word of God is not simply the content of the tradition which the church has received to preach. Rather, according

⁵⁴Craddock, As One Without Authority, 42.

⁵⁵Ibid., 42-43.

⁵⁶Ibid., 71.

⁵⁷Ibid., 110.

to Craddock, "the Word of God is the address of God to the hearer who sits before the text open to its becoming Word of God. God's Word is God's Word to the reader, listener, not a word about God gleaned from the documents."⁵⁸

Craddock makes the following points about biblical preaching:⁵⁹

(1) A preacher should not fear interpreting the Scripture by and for a congregation.

(2) Our membership in the church must be accepted.

(3) The preacher must bear the burden of interpreting Scripture for the congregation to which he preaches. He leads them into the experience of hearing the message of Scripture for their situations.

(4) The text is to be studied and shared not in dialogue with "the human situation" in general but with the issues facing the particular congregation participating in the sermon experience. What comes to fruition is not just a truth but the truth for this community.

(5) Responsible biblical preaching is not repetition of the words of the text but a new expression of the message of the text in language indigenous to the situation addressed. The interpretation of texts is evidenced in the New Testament itself and is necessary for the church today. Both text and people are involved together in the

⁵⁸Ibid., 114.

⁵⁹Ibid., 126-131.

Word of God. Where then is the Word of God to be found?

He answers:

To say the Scripture is the Word of God or that Scripture contains the Word of God is to identify the Word of God too completely with only one partner in the dialogue. Word, whether it be of God or of man is properly understood as communication and it is rather meaningless to discuss word in terms of one person. Equally meaningless is a discussion of Word of God fixed at one pole, the Bible, apart from the other, the church. Just as sound is vibrations received, so word is a spoken-heard phenomenon. The Word of God, if it is to be located, is to be located in movement, in conversation between Scripture and church.⁶⁰

The preacher must then confront the text, not dictionaries and commentaries about the text. He must engage in a lively dialogue with the text asking real questions. The preacher must carefully listen to the text. The preacher must "overhear" the text, i.e., hear it from a distance, as said earlier in this chapter. Overhearing leaves the text free of personal interruptions. Overhearing is a non-threatening way to hear. Slowly, one is drawn into the text's meaning. Finally, a decision must be made as to where one stands in the text. Here the principle of dynamic analogy is important. Always the minister needs to remember that time in his study, in sermon preparation, is time with all his congregation.

I have come to agree with Craddock in his understanding of the Word of God. This has been a long, painful pilgrimage. I was reared on the theological assumption that the Bible is the Word of God whether or not it is

⁶⁰ Ibid., 133.

read or heard. Now I believe I see more clearly, from the Bible itself, the nature of biblical authority. The Bible is Word of God as it is heard and as it affirms the identity and destiny of the community, the church. That was what led the church to include certain texts in the canon and to exclude others. For a long time I have realized the preacher's importance as the bridge between Scripture and church. In my sermons on Luke, it would have been impossible for me to preach those sermons, as they now exist, apart from my church. In another context, the sermons would not be Word of God. In humility I believe they were Word of God for my people in Laguna Beach. This does not mean I have a diminished appreciation for the Bible, just the opposite. This new approach has set the Bible free for me in my church and I am excited by the inclusion of the church in the Word.

Concerning the Story, Craddock makes several points in Overhearing the Gospel. "First, the Bible addresses the community of faith and is not a collection of theological and ethical arguments to persuade atheists or adherents of other religions."⁶¹ Secondly, "it is generally characteristic of the Bible not to repeat a story verbatim and from that story draw lessons and exhortations appropriate to the particular audience, but rather to retell the story in such a way that it properly addresses the hearers."⁶²

⁶¹Craddock, Overhearing, 66.

⁶²Ibid.

"If as interpreter, teacher, and preacher, I am to continue that discourse here and now--it is frightening. But there is comfort and correction in the knowledge that my retelling the story is done in a community that carries the tradition and listens to me through its memory."⁶³ Thirdly, "it is characteristic of the Bible to address particular situations and not worry about harmonizing each message with all its other messages on that topic. The Bible makes one point at a time."⁶⁴ Fourthly, "it is generally characteristic of the Bible to present its message in vivid images, analogies, and metaphors."⁶⁵

What has emerged in my mind is a new image of what preaching is about. At best it is a shared story that embraces the preacher, the listeners, the church context, and the message under a consciously chosen hermeneutic indicated by the context and needs of God's people and the world. When these all come together something beautiful and wonderful occurs. The Word of God again becomes flesh and dwells among us so as to save us, to transform the totality of our lives. It is this for which I work and pray.

⁶³Ibid., 67.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid., 69.

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